

THE RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCER

"THAT GOD IN ALL THINGS MAY BE GLORIFIED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST." -Peter.

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TIGHTEN THE BUCKLE.

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It is related that a cavalry officer, with a small number of followers was pursued by an enemy who were in large force. He discovered that his saddle-girth was becoming loose; his comrades were urging him on to greater speed; but he dismounted, tightened the loose buckle, and then rode on, amid the shouts of his companions. The broken buckle would have cost him his safety,—perhaps his life. His wise delay ensured his safety.

This incident suggests several spiritual lessons. A very obvious one is, that the Christian who is in such haste to rush off to his business in the morning that he does not spare any time for his Bible or for prayer, is quite likely to "ride for a fall" before sundown. One of the most eminent Christian merchants of New York told me that he never met his family at the breakfast table until he had had a refreshing interview with his God over his Bible and on his knees. His family worship afterward was not only a tightening of the buckle for himself, but was a gracious means of safety to his household. One of the greatest dangers in these days is that too many children are growing up—even in nominally Christian families—with sadly lax sentiments in many vital directions. They have loose views about God's day and God's Book, and very loose practices as to attendance upon God's worship. They start out in life with a broken buckle, and when the stress of temptation comes, they are easily thrown to the ground. Fathers and mothers owe to their children as well as to themselves the duty of tightening the saddle girth.

Not only do families suffer from laxity in parental government and godly parental training, but I fear that some congregations suffer from laxity in the teaching of their ministers. No church is very likely to rise higher than its own pulpit. If the shepherd of the flock holds loose doctrines, if he is so "liberal" that he gives away or throws away vital truths, if he lets down too many bars that the Bible wisely puts up, then it is no wonder that the flock wanders off into the ways of worldliness. There is no danger, in these days, of excessive strictness, or of "Puritanical" principles or practices. The danger is just from the opposite direction. Would it be a wise thing if some pastors, who see that their churches are being overtaken and demoralized by worldly temptations, would call a halt, and tighten their buckles?

The incident at the head of this brief article has a very close application to the maintenance of a vigorous, happy and useful Christian life. The very word "religion" is derived from a Latin word that signifies "to bind fast." True religion means the being bound fast to the Lord Jesus Christ in constant dependence upon him and obedience to him. How to keep up a healthy spiritual life, is the daily problem with every Christian. The parable of the buckle gives a hint. True piety is never self-sustaining. We can only do all things through Christ that strengtheneth us. Without him, nothing; with him, everything. Therefore it is that our Bible exhorts us, with prodigious emphasis, to "pray without ceasing." When we relax in this vitally important duty, our enemies will soon overtake us, and overmatch us, and leave us in the dust. Brethren and sisters, tighten the prayer-buckle.

A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN CHURCHES.

Somehow or other some churches have gotten the idea that when a deacon is elected his tenure of office is for life. Where this notion originated we do not know. But we do know that it is not based upon Scripture, and is contrary to sound policy. We find where seven men—probably deacons—were charged with the temporal affairs of the church, and ordained by the apostles. Acts vi, 1-6. We also find the qualifications of deacons laid down in 1 Tim. iii, 8-13. We also know that the Greek word translated "deacon" signifies servant; and it is so translated in Matt. xxiii, 11; John xii, 26. It is translated minister in Mark x, 43; 1 Cor. iii, 5; 1 Thess. iii, 2. When Paul addressed the letter to the Philippians, he mentioned the deacons along with the saints and pastors. Phil. i, 1. These are all the uses of the word, or references, to the office to be found in the New Testament. An examination of these passages fails to find a word or hint that the office of deacon was conferred upon one for life. There is no more scripture for electing a man deacon of a church for life than there is for calling a preacher as pastor for life.

The practice of electing deacons for life has resulted in great harm to many churches. Being without scriptural foundation, it is also unsound as to policy. You will call to mind churches where the greatest obstacle is an incompetent deacon. He is not qualified for the office and has not sense enough to resign, and so the church is hampered in all its work by a worthless deacon.

One may be a good deacon at one time and not at another. The local church is a growing institution. New members are added, new plans adopted, and new movements undertaken. The city or community grows in population, wealth, culture and influence. The church must keep pace with the progress of the community. Now a man who made a good deacon years ago, may be entirely unsuitable to-day, because he had not developed proportionately with his church. A deacon who does not endeavor to keep step with the intellectual and spiritual progress of his people is like the lazy pastor—he loses his efficiency as an officer and will be laid on the shelf.

Changed conditions in one's life may also disqualify him for a position to which he has been previously elected. Let us suppose a brother is elected deacon when the first children of his family are quite young. As they grow up in age, it develops that he has no control over them. Their disobedience and sin become notorious. Then, this man can no longer fill the office, for he does not meet the qualification, "ruling their children and their own houses well."

Take another example: A man in the office of deacon loses his standing in the community. He becomes careless about meeting his financial obligations, and may be unscrupulous in his dealings. We will not suppose there is any one charge against him of sufficient importance to justify a withdrawal of fellowship—he has just run down in the community and lost his influence for good. A multitude of smaller matters continuing for quite a while, have brought him into disrepute. Such a person can not scripturally fill the office of deacon, for he is not of "honest report."

Changed marriage relations may disqualify a deacon for the office. His first wife died and he married again. The second wife is neither grave nor sober. She has an evil temper and malicious tongue. She hurts his heart at home and his influence in the church. The deacon's wife must be of the Pauline pattern, and if she is not, her husband will be crippled in his work.

Again, congregations, sometimes, have mistaken judgment. They select a member and set him apart to the office of deacon. When the burden is placed upon his shoulders, it appears that he is the wrong man for the place. He is wanting in some of the essentials, but you could not tell it before. What are you to do? Keep this man for life? No; he is a cumberer of the

ground. Any policy that ties such an officer for life is unsound.

A man may have the scriptural qualifications for the office and be so situated at the time of his selection that he can serve acceptably. Later on his business changes. He finds it impossible to attend deacons' meeting, church conference, or to do the work assigned to him. The man ought not to keep his position. Some one who can and will do the work should have his place. And we venture the statement, that all over Texas, there are churches hampered by deacons who are incapacitated or disqualified, and who stand in the way of the progress of the kingdom. We suggest, as a remedy, that the old plan of electing deacons for life be abandoned. Good behavior and efficient service should determine the tenure of office. The following plan is not altogether original, but we have adopted it with satisfaction. All the present deacons, in the best spirit and with deepest love for their church, resign. The church appoints a committee of three to present a number of names to the church as deacons. From this list of names the three receiving the highest number of votes are elected for three years; the three receiving the next highest number of votes are to serve two years; and the three receiving the next highest number are to serve one year. A record is kept of each deacons' meeting, noting the absentees and work done by each deacon, and they will stand or fall by the record they make. If some are incompetent, they can be let off by not nominating them when the time for election comes, and no harm is done. Sensible deacons can be shown the wisdom of this plan, and will cooperate in inaugurating the same. The church will thereby be given the right to choose her own deacons; and at the same time can solve a most perplexing problem.—*The Baptist Standard*.

—One million one hundred and twenty thousand pounds in answer to prayer is the showing of the Muller Orphanage, Bristol, England, since its beginning, £41,792 being last year's contribution. Notwithstanding many prophecies that after the death of its founder the work would needs be carried on by new methods, it has continued for five years under Mr. Muller's plan of nearly sixty years. The list of gifts is lengthy and peculiar, the most notable of these being the proceeds of "an old set of false teeth." The report says that many hundred pounds have come into the treasury from this source in different years.