

The Visitor's Pulpit

A VIOLATED LAW.

BY REV. T. H. PORTER.

A discourse preached before the Western New Brunswick Baptist Association at Keswick, York Co., N. B., in 1873; and read before the Yarmouth County Ministerial Conference in Yarmouth, May 1879, and published by the unanimous request of both bodies.

Conclusion.

II. Having thus endeavored, in accordance with the general teaching of the Divine Word and enlightened reason, to explain this law, we now proceed to point out some reasons for its universal adoption.

And first, I remark that such compliance is obedience to Christ. The chief beauty of this requirement lies in the fact that it is divine, and was given by the Church's Great Law-giver. And this can be said of no other rule substituted for it, nor is it pretended to be. As we have just shown, it is only expressly enjoined here, but elsewhere, that those who know of wrong-doing go to the offender, and seek to save him. And even though you cannot see that this is here positively required, one thing you may be sure of, you violate no other law by conforming to that view, and such a course can, at least, do no injury. On the contrary, it is in perfect keeping with all Gospel principles, those who object usually satisfying themselves that some other course will do as well.

In the second place, that which is thus Scriptural is perfectly reasonable. For a moment again look at it. How simple and natural. Has your brother trespassed, or do you fear that he has or is likely to? Go to him, and go at once. Go to no one else. "Discover not the secret to another." Go from love only. Let it beam in your eye and tremble on your tongue. Go with earnest prayer for the divine blessing, and sincere confession of your own sin—"considering thyself lest thou also be tempted." And who more likely to restore him than such action—in the spirit of meekness? Has he committed a public offence known to many? Then his case is that much worse. And what better calculated to win and save him than for many, of their own accord, and impelled by one spirit, to go,—thus proving that it is not the will of their common "Father," nor of them, His children, that "one," even the most unworthy "of these little ones, should perish"? How much better every way, and how much more likely to win and save, than for a long-faced, straight-laced committee to break upon his startled ear the intelligence that while not one of his brethren, themselves included, thought enough of him to go voluntarily even to ascertain the facts, the Church thought enough of themselves to violate their solemn covenant by discussing the case behind his back, and, with no authority from the Lord, appoints those to go who should have gone without appointment, and thereby relieve others from an obligation resting with equal weight upon all.

But I remark further, that this method is really unobjectionable. Take any other that you choose—that ever has been or can be devised—and strong prejudices at once meet you, if upon no other, upon the ground that it is unscriptural and unauthorized. And so long as we fail to find a Divine plan, and resort to any of human devising, just so long must the action of our churches be variable, just so long will circumstances and policy, rather than law and principle, govern, and just so long will this objection obtain. But let this method be adopted because commended, and the more it is tried the more will its wisdom become manifest. Those who heartily accept will soon, and growingly, perceive its beauty and blessedness; those that resist will at least be compelled to admit that they have been proceeded with regularly, while the great majority of them will be led to bless the Saviour anew for his interest in them thus manifested; and those who look on and perhaps oppose will at last admire, and the world again exclaim—"Behold how these Christians love one another." Indeed, no sufficient and real objection can be made to it. It stands boldly forth challenging and defying criticism, while wherever another is substituted some will persist in maintaining that the Divine law has been violated, even though Church and Minister unite in declaring and arguing the contrary.

Again, it is economical. It is a labor-saving plan, although it may at first sight be thought the reverse. It accomplishes two things at the same time. It reclaims or "gains" the offender, and it precludes the necessity of Church action. Indeed, it does the work of the individual, the

committee and the Church, all at the same time. Admit that it is the Church's duty to deal with public offences. Is not the Church made up of individuals, and must not those individuals act in every case, and always be responsible? The only question then is, how can they, most easily, most safely, and most effectively? I affirm that this law of Christ combines in itself that method, and long and repeated trial, but confirms the conviction. And thus the wisdom of its Framer becomes increasingly apparent, the more perfectly we understand and conform to it. And it economizes not only in work, but in results. Other plans may develop one side of Christianity, but the beauty of this is it develops the whole, and at one and the same time. It does so, in the first place, with the individual labored with. Nothing so effectually prevents his wandering further, with all its terrible results of discipline, exclusion, his own ruin, and reproach upon the Saviour's cause. And while it is more likely than anything else to bring him to repentance, it at the same time convinces him of the value of religion and its privileges, as nothing else can. It develops also the Christianity of those who perform this service. We have hinted at the grace requisite to have in exercise to do this duty and do it rightly. But let us not forget its influence in forming such a character and disposition. And here I appeal to those who may have tried it whether there is one virtue which its right performance does not greatly tend to strengthen. You who have in weakness and trembling, and with earnest prayer for strength and wisdom, gone to an erring one, beloved, tell me, as you spoke those words of tenderness and Christian faithfulness, and perhaps witnessed the blessed result, were not your confidence and joy increased; was no cloud lifted, no strength imparted, was Jesus less precious, your hope of heaven less bright and joyous, your love for souls and willingness to labor for all men, diminished?

And what is true of the individual is no less true of the body. In this way you promote at once its purity, activity and strength. You do so, because nothing so effectually tends to sift out the unworthy from our churches. You do so in the blessed influence thereby directly exerted upon the individuals labored with, and those who labor. You do so by providing work, for the want of which so many churches are languishing and dying. You do so by thus uniting brethren in service, affection and belief. You do so by promoting individuality in the Church, the great and felt want of the age, and thereby doing more than is possible in any and every other way to secure a return to primitive Christianity, promote genuine and permanent revivals, and bring about the latter day glory. Give me the power to secure the performance of this neglected duty, and I will pledge all that is necessary to make the Church what she should be, and to speedily convert the world. And if the accomplishment of all this, in the performance of one duty is not true economy, where, I ask, shall we look for it?

But that which is thus Scriptural, reasonable, unobjectionable, and economical, is also essential. I have spoken of the tendency of obedience to this great command of our blessed Lord. It is my purpose, in conclusion, to show that what is so desirable can be secured in no other way. It is essential in the first place to the complete reform and salvation of those who have unhappily wandered. I admit that occasionally a case may occur of one returning to God without the intervention of human instrumentality, and especially through no private or personal labor. The earnest sermon may have arrested his attention, or God may have spoken to him directly through His Word and Spirit. But the real question is, is this His ordinary mode of working? That all reclaimed have not thus been brought requires no proof which the testimony of those present cannot furnish. On the contrary, I think it will be admitted that more of this has been done by private effort than in all other ways. Why, then, I ask, are so many now in "darkness" who were once "light in the Lord"? Christian brother or sister, have you been faithful in the performance of your duty to the erring? The Church and the world to-day are full of backsliders, and God intends to bring them back through the instrumentality of his children. And this is the only way in which we can clear ourselves from complicity with their sin. The true rendering of the passage in Leviticus, already more than once referred to, it is said is, "Thou

shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor that thou bear not sin for him"; that is, that thou be not a partaker of his sin, "and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." And there really is no way of escaping the danger of contamination and guilt from others' sins without doing all we can, first, to prevent, and then to correct.

I remark further that obedience to this requirement is essential to the true manifestation of the Christian life. When a right spirit is in exercise either toward the sin or the sinner, this course will be pursued. And here, I think is the secret of much of the opposition to this plan. It is difficult, and requires to much of imperfect human nature. Nothing else demands such humility, wisdom, love and every virtue, which is only another proof that it is Divine. It needs more grace than Christians always—may I not say often—have in exercise. And this being so, much of the objection made is really strong presumptive argument in its favor. And so will it be while Churches and Christians remain imperfect. And while conformity to it is thus among the best evidences of the possession of true Christianity, it is equally necessary to the growth and perfection of that Christianity. It is required to provide the work needful for it, as well as to promote the grace necessary for the successful performance of that work. Many are making no progress in the Divine life, simply because they are doing nothing. But do what we may, no Christian life can be symmetrical, that is not to some extent occupied with efforts to aid other Christians in right living. And the advantage of this system is, it impels to that so much needed acquaintance, requisite to the "watching over one another" of our covenant, and from the neglect of which our churches are so suffering.

It is required to promote the union necessary to true progress. We must have unity of heart and action, before we can look for unity of sentiment. And nothing so tends to promote this as work for each other. But there can be no united action in this matter which is not the result of obedience to a common law. Obedience to it is required to promote true revivals. Let the churches rise to the true performance of this duty, and they will not neglect such labor for the salvation of men as must prove successful. But while this is neglected, how can we hope to see the work of God revived, and the graces, strength and membership of our churches increase? In a word, it is essential to a return to the individualism that so characterized early Christianity, and does all subsequent approaches thereto, and which many of our modern schemes so plainly show the desire for, and are so zealously laboring to bring about. It throws the responsibility of the Church's growth, purity, and her members' good, where it properly belongs, upon each individual member, as nothing else can. And its hearty adoption by the professed Christian world would instrumentally do more than any, and almost everything else to cause the Church to look "forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

Finally, this plan is essential to prevent and correct the evils which its neglect, coupled with unwise and unscriptural methods of discipline have introduced and fostered, in offenders and offended, the Church and the world, as well as to allay prejudice that now exist against discipline itself. We have tried to show that conformity to this rule in all cases is lawful. Is it not also expedient? Is there no danger in not adopting it? Danger of displeasing Him who gave it, whose we are, and whom we are required to obey and serve? Danger of mistakes and injury if we adopt any other? Have not serious evils resulted from other courses of action? Are not needless committees often appointed, and do not cases frequently come before the Church that need not, and that do injury instead of good to all concerned? And may not all this be traced and must it not be attributed directly to neglect of this positive and explicit requirement of our Lord Jesus Christ? "If thy brother trespass go and tell him his fault," &c.

The consequence of strict conformity to this law need not be dreaded. While we adhere to Christ's requirements, first in not neglecting discipline, and then in our method of carrying it out, we may be certain that He will stand by us and ratify our acts the same as if done by himself;—verse 18th. It is therefore not the performance, but the neglect that is to be feared. And the cause that will ultimate-

ly suffer from right doing is not worth upholding. Many persons wait till cases arise requiring action before they determine on the course to pursue. This is not wise. Passion and prejudice are likely then to blind and lead astray. The time for this is when it can be done deliberately and thoroughly, and a judgment formed solely upon the merits of the case. Is not that time with you, now? May the Lord grant the spirit of wisdom and a sound mind, and grace to obey "from the heart, that form of doctrine which was delivered you." "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he who converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

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