

Original Contributions.

AN OPEN LETTER.

My Dear Brother,—The questions your kind letter contains are of so much importance we will take the liberty to answer in the columns of THE CHRISTIAN. We may thereby benefit others as well as yourself.

Your last question we will make the first, because we consider it the most important, i. e., "Is it right to teach and practice that for which we have not apostolic precept or precedent?" We should judge from the tone of your letter that you ask this question from an honest, sincere love of the truth, and not out of any captious spirit. We appreciate your desire to be guided by Christ and his apostles only. This is the desire that actuates our hearts; and no doubt that with this desire to know the truth, and only the truth, we can come to a proper and mutual understanding of what is meant by being "apostolic."

Let us in the first place consider the negative side of the question and ascertain what it does not mean. It does not mean that we shall do as the apostles did in all things. We find three of the apostles at two different times sleeping when they should have been awake. We find Peter dissembling and Paul rebuking him for it. We find Paul getting into a contention with his brother Barnabas. These things are not to be precedents for us. Then, again, the apostles taught the "holy kiss," and that the women should pray with their heads covered, and other like things, which are not to be precepts for us now. You, no doubt, see that we cannot make all the apostles did and said our rule of faith and practice. You will very naturally ask how are we to know what to receive and what to reject if all are not to be received. One of Paul's own injunctions will settle this. In Phil. iv. 8, he tells us that whatever things are "true, honest, just, lovely, and of good report," to take account of, if there be any virtue in them. This is virtually saying we are to receive only what is good, because it is good, and not because it is commanded; that the obligatory force of a moral command was in the virtue of the thing commanded and not in the commander. This is why a moral command is often changed and loses its force, because the virtue of the thing commanded is lost. Custom made the command, "to greet each other with an holy kiss," right and good in the apostolic days. But the custom of modern times destroys the virtue of the act, and therefore loses its force as a command to us. This is why the apostle bid us to make the virtue of a moral action the rule of acceptance. This is why that some things commanded in apostolic days are not good now, and some things that were not commanded then are good now. But these changes can be made only with moral commands—as the obligations of a moral command ceases when the virtue of the thing commanded ceases. This is not true of a positive command. The force of positive laws or commands is in the one who commands, and not in the thing commanded, and cannot, therefore be changed unless the author of the command changes it. For us to change a positive command is disloyal to him who commands. Authority, or loyalty to authority, is only expressed in our acceptance of positive law. We can neither divest positive law of its authority, nor invest moral law with authority without being untrue to apostolic Christianity. The Apostle Paul's command to Timothy was "to drink no longer water, but use a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities." This was commanded because it was good for Timothy, and not good simply because it was commanded.

You see that the virtue of this command was in the condition of Timothy's health, and not in him who commanded. If Timothy regained his health and had no trouble with his stomach, the command to "take a little wine" would lose its obligatory force. The change of conditions or circumstances must necessarily change the command. This may be true of any such command that has not in itself an eternal fitness. It would not be disloyal to Paul for Timothy to stop drinking wine when he was free from infirmities. But it would be disloyal and unjust for Timothy to invest that command with authority and make it a test of fellowship and condemn his brethren who had no trouble with their stomachs for not drinking wine and charge them with being untrue to apostolic precepts. But Timothy did not do this, neither will the Timothy of the nineteenth century do it.

The mistake that is too often made is in taking a command that was made important only by the conditions and usages of the age in which it was given, and making it important and obligatory in an age where the conditions and usages are altogether different. Positive law, such as baptism and other commands we could mention, are made important by the authority and power of the commander, or law-giver, and not by the conditions or usages of the age, and no condition or age can charge them. To follow the teachings of the apostles we must distinguish between that which is authoritative and that which is expedient. The idea of apostolic precedent is not in a tabulated form of doctrine, but in a devoted, consecrated life. To be apostolic we must follow that which is good. The Christianity of the apostolic days was faith and love and an unreserved devotion to the cause of Christ, a life of benevolence and purity and unity. It is this life of a consecrated and united brotherhood that we need in this age. The apostolic church was a church with a soul and body. Here in the apostolic church is found the only solution of the question of sociology that is now agitating the world.

We must be very careful, dear brother, that we do not mistake reformation for innovation, and conclude because we do some things that the apostles did not do that we are therefore not apostolic. The church to-day that can lay any claim to apostolic precept and precedent is not the church that is simply attending to the apostolic order of worship, but the church that is reproducing the life of the apostles in meeting and encircling human needs and reaching human hearts and coming in touch with human wants. The true idea of apostolic life must be found in our attitude toward a perishing, famishing world. We must measure our standard of primitive apostolic Christianity by our interest in the salvation of our fellow men. Here is the living issue that is forcing itself upon the church. What are we doing for the good and the salvation of man? The church that is doing the most for the elevation and redemption of man is the most apostolic. You can see in the consideration of these facts, and in the history of the churches, that the very churches that are considered not apostolic are the very ones that are apostolic in the true sense.

Time will not allow us to say more on this question in this paper. We hope to be able to answer your other questions in their regular order, as we have opportunity.

H. M.

The Christian life is the easiest there is to live. The difficult part comes in when an effort is made to conjoin it to a sinful or worldly life. The two will not mix. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."—*Ass. Ref. Presbyterian.*

Sorrow remembered sweeten present joy.

—Pollock.

A WORKING CHURCH.

What a blessing it is to know that our Heavenly Father has permitted us to labor and learn our way back to heaven. It is very true that we are all sailing on life's stream, and according to the breeze that fills our sails and the course we are steering will be our destination.

Heaven places a premium on consecrated devotion, but we must not conclude because we are good simply that that makes us special favorites of heaven; but "glory, honor and peace to him that worketh good," says Paul (Rom. ii. 10). God loves the living working Christian, and the church, comprised of such Christians, make a living working church. The life that a church exhibits is indicative of her strength. The amount of work done is the secret of her influence. A working church is a growing church. She is sending her roots down deeper and deeper into the soil of divine truth, from whence she draws the nurture that enables her to unfold a better life and wield a greater influence for good. A working church is a prepared church, composed of prepared members. The successful Christian is the working Christian. Even so the successful church is the working church. The church that fails to take care of her spiritual interests becomes insolvent. Christ did not die to give the church a name simply, but he died that she might live and be a savor of life unto life. The amount of work done proves beyond doubt the true relationship existing between Christ and the church. It also proves she is alive, and that she draws her breath through Christ her living head.

Some Christians never pray, never sing, never give; they don't weigh much in the kingdom of God. The church at Sardis must have been comprised of such Christians, for she died. But when a church is built of living stones, which is but the Holy Spirit's designation for a living Christian, who sing and pray, and give and pay, where every soul has a soul, and every faculty of that soul is in unison with the great soul of Jesus Christ, then you have a living working Church. The fields of the farmer does not yield bountifully because of any special sunshine or showers, but because of more thought and labor. It is also true of the church. She only receives the smiles of heaven when she puts her shoulder to the wheel. The reason why the lamp of life is burning so low in some churches is because they burn a poor quality of oil. The oil of gladness is exchanged for the oil of sadness. When a church represents doctrine without the spirit of Christ, she is burning the wrong kind of oil.

What is to be done then to remedy this difficulty? Why, throw out the old lamps of inactivity and have the electric light of heaven to illuminate the soul. Fill a prayer room with incandescence of that kind every prayer-meeting night and people will soon know where and what a working church is. When the great search light of heaven gets into the soul of every church member, the church becomes as a city on the mountain top—throwing her bright rays into the dark valley of this sin-blighted world. A working church is a blazing advertisement of heaven's richest blessings and a very Bethesda to the weary and heavy laden soul. And when you enter her courts you will not feel as though you were entering a church-yard, where the only consolation you will derive will be in reading the inscriptions upon the tomb-stones, which will say, once we lived, but now we are dead. Every healthy soul loves to pray and loves to work, and the church of healthy Christians is a praying church. Heaven is not won by weapons of our own manufacture, and the church that prides herself on joining the redeemed throng when time shall cease