

THEORY AND PRACTICE.

T. H. BLENUS.

A great many people who term themselves Christians seem to have lost sight of the important truth, if they ever saw it, that the religion of Christianity deals not in theories, but with conditions. I have an extended acquaintance with a large number of Christians who are theoretically and doctrinally the truest and best men and women the world ever knew. Their religious theories often present a perfection of Christian character transcending even the limits of Christian requisition. Theoretically, their benevolence is unbounded; theoretically, their charity is proverbial; theoretically, their religious soundness is above and beyond reproach; theoretically, they are graduates from the school of revelation; they are unteachable, for they know it all.

These dear, deluded souls are practically as barren as the seashore. Their benevolence begins and ends with themselves, and their charity is bounded by their own selfish wants and desires. Many of them mourn and deeply sigh over the ignorance, the superstition and the sad and woful departures of the religious world from primitive faith and practice, but at the same time they are totally and unmovably unwilling to live, to work and to spend for the correction of error or for the alleviation of suffering and distress. They are a contradiction in themselves. While in theory they are philanthropists, really and practically they are misanthropes.

Theory, if true, is good, but practice is better. Theory alone never fed the hungry, never clothed the naked, never relieved the distressed and never saved a soul. Theory in religion without practice is a great source of pride, arrogance, coldness, formality, irritability and pugnacity, and is a cheap, deceptive, yet effectual means in the hands of the arch-enemy in subverting the interests of Christianity, and dwarfing the human soul into a condition of uselessness. Theory may be the stalk but practice is the blossom, the leaves, the fruit. Theory may see and understand error and its attendant evils; but practice does more; it lays hold of them and with an open hand, a loving heart, and a practical concern engages at once in the exemplification of truth and love by works and deeds.

I have long since been quite satisfied with the theoretical part of our position, but I have also for a long time been dissatisfied with much of the external and practical in our religion. The heathen will not be brought to Christ, our neighbors will not be converted to the truth of a pure religion, our own hearts will not burn with an intense interest in the souls of our fellowmen till we theorize less, and practically come in contact with the needs and wants around us. Theories however true they may be, however logical, or clearly defined and well founded, are worth no more than the breath it takes to utter them, unless they are of practical importance, and are practically carried out. The truth of what I write has been very often a ground of unfortunate comment by those before whom we are written epistles. We ought not to be satisfied with the justness and correctness of our plea. To be right, is to do right.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.

O. B. STOCKFORD.

Notwithstanding the pretty thorough discussion, during the last few years, of the subject of Christian Union, and the clear teaching of the New Testament thereon, there yet seems to be much misunderstanding as to what it consists in. Many prominent religious teachers, for instance, still contend that denominational divisions are but natural and right.

I think that it is generally held, by those who defend denominationalism, that the possession of the Spirit is all that is necessary to unite Christ's disciples; and as Christians have the Spirit, irrespective of these distinctions, they are therefore united. If they follow this reasoning to its natural conclusion, however, they will find that it contradicts the scriptural teaching respecting divisions.

I believe that true "unity of the Spirit" will produce as perfect a union as can be attained in this life. But admitting that many of the members of the denominations have the Spirit (as undoubtedly they have), can they be said to possess true unity of the Spirit?

In order to discuss this question we must first know who the persons are that it is intended to unite. We would naturally take the term Christian Union to mean the union of *Christians*. Whether or not this is what is generally understood by the phrase to-day, it is certainly what our Saviour prayed for and inspired writers enjoined.

Now Christians all have the Spirit, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

These two facts—that the union sought for is that of Christians only, and that all Christians possess the Spirit—one would think need only to be stated to be received. But much of the misunderstanding concerning Christian union arises from not considering them.

If it is true, as those favoring denominationalism affirm, that they who possess the Spirit have true union, then there cannot be any divisions in the church of Christ; for the church is composed only of who have the spirit.

But there actually were divisions in the church in apostolic times. Paul severely denounces the schism in the "church of God" at Corinth. And again, why would our Saviour pray for the union of his followers if there was no possibility of their ever becoming divided? No distinction can be made between what God and what man considers the church, as it is not recognized in scripture.

Some contend that the schisms in the church, referred to in the scriptures, are caused by heresy. The word heresy is sometimes used to-day to denote the adherence to some new idea or opinion respecting some speculative religious theme. If the word is used in this sense, then sectarianism affords the best example of its results.

If, however, we mean by heresy the denying of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, then heretics cannot be members of the church of Christ, because it is on the belief and acknowledgment of these facts that a person becomes and continues a Christian. This is the scriptural teaching respecting heresy. The Apostle Paul calls upon the churches to reject heretics—evidently because they have ceased to be members.

When certain persons have separated themselves from a certain society, we cannot logically say that they form divisions of that society. So an heretic cannot form a division, or part of a division, of the church, because he is not in the church. We must therefore look elsewhere for divisions.

The Apostle Paul severely condemns the factions that existed among the early Corinthian brethren. Now there was probably but one congregation of Christians at Corinth. At least it is very apparent that their divisions were not as great as the present denominations.

If one body, therefore, be censured for divisions, how much more should a number of bodies be condemned when their differences are so great that they do not care to worship or commune together? It would, indeed, be hard to imagine greater divisions in the church than sectarian ones.

While, however, Christians, although divided, must have the Spirit; yet it is evident that while such separations continue, they do not possess the *unity* of the Spirit. Indeed it would appear that they who cause and keep up divisions do not possess the Spirit so far as they do these things. Paul told the Corinthian brethren that they were carnal on account of their "envying strife and divisions." The carnal mind is placed in opposition to the spiritual by the same writer. But although lacking the Spirit in this particular they possessed it in some degree, for the apostle addressed them as "The Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." The apostle, however, evidently does not refer to those contentious persons who foster and delight in divisions. They evidently have departed from the faith. (Gal. v. 19-21).

So that no argument can be drawn in favor of denominationalism, on the ground that all Christians possess the Spirit—such possession not necessarily carrying with it true Christian union.

Nevertheless, I believe spiritual union to be the great requisite in church unity. There cannot possibly be true union without it.

The question therefore arises, What is true spiritual union?

Peace and love are given as two of the fruits of the Spirit. Can these two virtues be said to characterize the intercourse of the members of the different sects? Can it be truly said that the adherents of the various denominations are "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," while engaged in contending for "distinctive peculiarities?" Take away these barriers and denominationalism will fail, peace will reign and love will bring forth her fruits.

The scriptural teaching respecting the unity of the Spirit seems to be quite plain. It all tends to harmonize with the admonition given to the Phillipians, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord of one mind."

The above are my views regarding this phase of the union question, and I think they are those of the majority of the Disciples