

Faithfulness.

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We have fallen on poetic and sentimental times, on times when preachers are expected to be melodious, and when the public ear is only open to soft sayings and sweet sounds. No community seems particularly athirst for truth, but alive to dulcet harmonies and the witchery of the pleasant speech. Our pulpits are gently vocal with smooth words concerning Christian charity, Christian love, the grace of faith, and the splendours of hope. For one discourse on positive duty, we have a score on privilege; and for one on the inflexibility of obligation, we have many on the pliability of belief. The sharp, stern, moral aspects of religion are retired from the forefront of discussion, and the more æsthetic features are revealed to delighted thousands. So much is said about Christian freedom, independence, and enjoyment that we quite overlook the law of right and righteousness which enters so fully into the teachings of our Saviour.

One unacquainted with Christianity would be likely to infer from the tone of modern exposition that its supreme aim is to beautify life, not to regenerate it; to adorn society, not to purify it. Even its Almighty Author is presented in such a manner as to leave the impression that the ethical forms a secondary and lower stratum in his character, that he is more emotional than upright, deciding his dealings by effectual impulses more than by righteous convictions. We hear much of his love, his pity and sympathy, and but little of his rectitude, justice, and unwavering integrity. And yet, according to the Scriptures, the God of love is primarily and pre-eminently the God of righteousness, who, though he keepeth mercy for thousands, will not clear the guilty, and who, though he pardoneth the sinner, will not do to save through the intercession of Christ, who, died, as the new version has it "the righteous for the unrighteousness." Equally faulty are the prevailing sentimental views of personal religion. Conscientiousness, principle, obedience, steadfastness in duty, are treated in the Bible as fundamental to discipleship. It is, of course, described as generous, loving, and sympathetic; but it is, after all, devoted to the less pretentious virtues of honesty and fidelity. Hence the large place which the duty of faithfulness occupies in the Book. The Apostle Paul addresses two of his epistles respectively to "the faithful in Christ Jesus," and to "the faithful brethren in Christ." He urges Timothy to commit what he had received to "faithful men," for, as he says in his letter to the Corinthians, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found, not eloquent, nor attractive, but 'faithful.' Nor is this qualification exclusively important in the clergy for our Saviour points out its indispensableness in all who claim to be his followers. In the parable of the "Talents," He pronounces this approval on the servants who were even loyal to their trust. "Well done, good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of the Lord." And in the Apocalypse the living and triumphant Redeemer exclaims: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."

It is natural for us to discriminate between different beliefs and duties, to regard some as of higher moment than others, and to ascribe to them various degrees of rank and dignity. Fidelity, however, considers them all as demanding recognition and honor. When Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their scrupulous attention to the lesser matters of the law, while they neglected the weightier, he was careful to add, "these they should have done, and not have left the others undone," and the rule, impliedly, at least, is laid down, that the great and the small, the essential and the non-essential, are of equal binding force. Faithfulness does not stand choosing between them, preferring one over the other; but with impartial love zealously embraces both.

The duties of a general officer may be more important than those of a subaltern, and the responsibilities of a sea captain may be graver than those of a sailor, and yet who will deny the obligation of the inferior to be as loyal to their trust as the superior? Were we for a moment to admit that the obligation diminishes in proportion with the value and dignity of the service due, we should be encouraging general laxity and ultimate lawlessness. Yet there are those among professors of religion who practically, though perhaps unintentionally, subscribe to this pernicious doctrine. They decline to unite with the church, because that step is not as vital to the soul's welfare as trusting in Christ; or they refuse to submit to the baptism Jesus appointed, as they are pleased to regard the baptism of the Spirit as all-sufficient; they neglect attendance on public worship, the service of the Lord's supper, and the gathering in the Sunday school, as these duties are not to be compared with the more important ones of private devotion, spiritual communion and family religion. We might well ask, Who gave them the right thus to discriminate? It is certainly not conferred by divine authority, and at best it is only a usurpation which loudly proclaims either their ignorance or their infidelity.

If they are correct, their large debts should only be paid, not little ones; contracts of magnitude, should be kept, but not small ones; and leaders of grave commercial or political enterprises should be true to their trust, but careless when it assumes less imposing proportions. No casuist in

his senses would commit himself to any such theory. It is thoroughly untenable and unsound. The law of Christ on the subject seems to provide against two extremes: against neglecting the more important for the less important; and against condemning the less important in the fancied interest of the more important; and in both directions we find the law of faithfulness being constantly violated.

There are excellent persons in every community who err in contending for the microscopically minute, and who are oblivious to the claims of everything beyond. I remember a respectable clergyman taking me to task for preaching on the second advent of Christ, a theme of vast moment, while he had been spending weary days and hours in deciding a trifling question in Greek exegesis. I have known others to be inveterately intent against every kind of amusement, but generously charitable towards the more withering blight of evil-speaking and slander. Others there are who would exclude a fellow-member from the church on account of his failure to sympathise with some ceremony, as infant baptism or close communion, while they are ready to tolerate among them men and women of censorious, worldly spirit who are more attached to the rubric. And yet there are others who are circumspect in outward religious observances, but whose everyday business life in society is beneath contempt. They delight to extol free grace and the unmatched mercy of God; and well they may, for they have not the ghost of a chance to be saved by works. They will wrangle for hours about the act of baptism, apostolic succession, or something else of the same kind, while the weightier matters of the law are totally neglected. This inconsistency we all perceive at a glance and condemn; but there is similar, if not as serious an inconsistency committed by those who feel called on to exalt the sublimer verities of the gospel by depreciating the more commonplace. They deem it necessary to undervalue ordinances and ordinary duties, that the grandeur of grace may be discerned. But the great truths of God's Word do not require the humiliation of the lowlier ones. They are like noble men, whose nobility is not enhanced by degrading others. In their own solemn worth they stand, and they can well afford that full justice should be done their inferiors. What right have men to array as rivals what Christ has allied in fellowship? What right have they to thrust the copper out of circulation on account of the gold? What right have they to cause the feet of the mighty to trample down the head of the weak? Faithfulness answers "None;" and with heart of loyalty to every word spoken by Christ, with brow of reverence, and with lips of truth, faithfulness accepts his mandates, choosing not between them, and without partiality acknowledges their authority and bows to their requirements.

Jesus says, "He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much;" that is, fidelity in affairs of comparative insignificance will educate the mind up to fidelity in graver concerns. This does not preclude the possibility of men who have been careless of ordinary obligations rising under the stress of circumstances and the impulse of sublime motive to a lofty ideal of duty and to the height of self-sacrifice in its discharge. Ordinary men have suddenly become heroes, and questionable Christians have become martyrs. Youths who never felt sufficient interest in their country to attend a political meeting were ready when the war began to lay their lives upon its altar. Pilots, who were not distinguished for attention to the ordinary claims of home or society, in a grave crisis remained at their post until relieved by death; and rough miners, who could not be credited with very high moral ideas, have not hesitated to go down into the mine, breathing foul gases, for the sake of rescuing stifling comrades.

We never can tell what humanity will do under peculiar circumstances. A man the other day permitted a child to drown, because, as he said, "it was none of his business." But the way to prevent such disgraceful exhibitions of cowardice, and to fit ourselves for the graver emergencies, is to seek the moral training which comes with fidelity to little things. We may be faithful on supreme occasions even if this is neglected, but we will be if it is scrupulously cared for. The reason for believing this lies in the habit of duty-doing because it is duty, which this devotion forms. A soldier who has been trained under fire gradually acquires such firmness, and such a sense of submission to command, that he will dash onward in the face of a blazing battery; and by a similar process the sailor is educated to invade the darkness of the stormy night, and mid-air wage that battle which is to decide the safety of ship and cargo. The business man who school himself from the beginning to regard as sacred the smallest money trusts, will at last attain to that condition of mind where the largest cannot tempt.

In every stage the moral life obedience, prepares for obedience, and one act of rectitude opens the way for another. If the doctrine is accepted that right is right, and must be honored, to whatever range of duty it belongs, conscience will be cast in its mould, and every exaction will be joyfully met. The subtle connection between our deeds which accounts for this growth in fidelity also operates in the opposite direction, and explains what we have frequently seen to be true, that one sin prepares the way for another. Evil habits beget evil habits; one betrayal of confidence makes a way for a second, and the second for a third, and so on through all the history of iniquity. It is the old story of the worm in

the flower, the speck of corruption in the tree, the leak in the ship, the flaw in the iron, the break in the embankment, the steady progress from bad to worse, from Hades to Hell. But though moving in the direction of evil, nevertheless it illustrates the educating power of conduct.

That faithfulness to the claims of the ordinary and the unimportant prepares for faithfulness to the important and extraordinary, may be inferred from the fact that in the former case there are lacking many stimulants to duty which are generally present in the latter. In fulfilling the commonplace obligations of life no encouraging words of praise are heard, and one supreme act of devotion will win more plaudits than an entire career of plodding rectitude. Indeed, such characters, instead of being commended are censured by some for their lack of spirit, and their slavish conformity to a rigid, narrow system. Frequently they are ridiculed by the reckless—the ridicule is hard to bear, and at times almost impossible to endure. The youth who entered on his business life with the most exact notions of duty has been swerved from rectitude by sneer and mockery when all other means had failed to move him. If he could only have seen the moral grandeur of his position, he would have been saved. But that is just what he usually does not see? and what heroes, martyrs, and reformers most likely know will be seen by an applauding world when they measure strength with their powerful antagonists, and pour out their blood in sacrifice for the right, or for the truth. Some one has spoken of the nettle cares of life, and of the corrodings of daily trials, and we can all of us understand from experience how difficult it is steadily to pursue the monotonous path of duty with these tormenting and wearing us away. If, under circumstances such as these, where there is neither inspiration nor sense of elevation, what the hand finds to do is done, done sternly, because it ought to be done, how easy would it be for such an one to stand undismayed and unaffected in the presence of a great crisis, and with the conscientiousness of an immortal award awaiting the issue, grapple with its problems and overcome its difficulties. Thus, then, fidelity in the lower ensures fidelity in the higher.

As for myself, and recalling how near I stood a few weeks ago to the end of life, my sincere ambition is when that end shall come and I am laid away at rest, to be worthy of this epitaph:

Faithful unto death.

Greater honour this than to inscribe on this perishing stone fulsome eulogies on the dead man's eloquence or liberalism. Eloquence is only a gift, faithfulness is a virtue; liberalism is merely a good natured indifference—most common among men who find it a task to think—but faithfulness is steadfastness and loyalty.—Sel.

Righteousness.

Character is not complete unless to the possession of the elements of health, wealth, knowledge, sociability and beauty we add another, viz., righteousness or rightness or virtue. In a measure it may be regarded as the rational voluntary combination of the other five elements. It may be described as right disposition of one's self toward all known or knowable things. If the school trains for the best citizenship in the final analysis it is of primary importance that earnest attention be given to this last and crowning element in the scheme of human welfare. The boy or girl who goes from the public school without strong notions of right and wrong is all the worse and more dangerous to society for having attended school. Our youths need to be thoroughly grounded in the elements of radically wrong with our educational system for instead of building up a strong virtuous, intelligent and law abiding citizenship it will simply feed the destructive forces of our civilization.

Does it make but little difference whether the multitude of young men and women leaving our schools every year to enter the great field of active life are shrewd, dextrous, bold capable persons and are yet without sturdy moral character. We should not forget that the condition of social political and religious life in our country rests upon no other basis than that of the honesty and purity of the individual citizen. Indeed, public morality, is only the collective of private morality, and the standard of the one is a true index of the other—public morality, like the river, never rises above its source.

Childhood is the nations one opportunity to build a strong, virtuous, courageous, earnest and righteous citizenship. A nation is strong only as its men and women are strong, and the responsibility for successful free government finally reverts to the men and women of that government. We grumble and complain of bad conditions in municipal affairs and decry corruption in state and national politics and condemn our public officials in unmeasured terms for maladministration of law. That is manlike. Let us be Godlike and look within ourselves for the real cause of civic unrighteousness. If our beloved country escapes the fate of all nations that have forgotten God and thrown moral principle to the winds it will be due to the training of our children in the home, the church and the school that instills into them a reverence for law and order and decency and that admits of no compromise that attacks the principle of moral integrity. Some one has said "If we train the intellectual powers it serves but to exhibit the skeleton of the mind, which must be filled out with the beauty and symmetry of