

Messenger and Visitor

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Doctrine and Life.

Doctrine, which is only another word for the truth which we believe, has much more to do with the life we live than most of us realize. The Apostle Jude has this in mind, when he says, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith," etc., that is building up or forming your characters on the basis of the truth which has been made known to you, and which you have received as true. That a man should act according to the facts which he believes is most natural. We can hardly conceive of his doing anything else.

But there is another side to this matter which demands perhaps more attention than it often receives. While doctrine has an influence on character, it is also true that the life has a strong influence upon the doctrine. In a majority of instances, it will be found that a man conforms his belief to his character and life. Reference has frequently been made to the fact that the French assembly declared that "there is no God," and that thereupon the whole nation plunged into all manner of unblushing sins. But what led to this? Had not the French people become degraded to a very low level before they made this declaration?

Centuries of a state church, centuries of priestcraft, centuries of the infamous conspiracy between confessors and mistresses, to urge weak, superstitious, sensual kings to acts of oppression, centuries of the priest and the monarch each upholding the other in all that was dishonest, cruel, selfish, centuries of the confessional betraying the people to the king, and of the king enforcing the demands of the priesthood; all this had debased the national character, had burned into the nation a conviction of the hollowness and falseness of all religious professions. The declaration that there was no God, simply giving form to that which was already deeply graven on the minds of men. The people abandoned themselves to all that was bad; and there they found their doctrine so that their creed should not rebuke them.

The time was on this Continent and in these Provinces that the practice of infant baptism, along with the union of church and state, lowered the tone of piety in the churches; the dykes were thrown down; the world swept unrebuked into the church; devotion died; morality sunk to a low ebb; an unregenerate church membership prepared the way for an unregenerate ministry. All this led; then followed *defection*—the denial of the atonement, the denial of the Deity of Christ, of the inspiration of the Bible and of the work of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration of men. But the character of life went first; the doctrine followed.

Who has not met young men brought up under religious influences, who, refusing to yield to the commands of God, led careless and vicious lives and eventually took refuge in unbelief?

When a Christian finds his belief in the doctrines of the gospel growing weak, his doubts arising, it is well for him to look within, and to see whether it is not the fact that coldness of heart has given rise to a wandering of the head. We need a sympathetic spirit in order to receive and understand the truth. Our most valuable lessons are learned in the school of experience. Where there is no experience there is no very clear apprehension of the truth.

In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul describes the perverseness of men, their folly,

their selfishness, their vanity, all leading them to the denial of the spirituality of God, and then in turn this denial reacting on their characters and rendering them doubly vile. But degradations of character led the way.

It is not only "Take heed what ye hear"—it is also "Take heed how ye hear." The character of the tree is known by the fruit. So is that of a man.

What Another Says

There was published some years ago a little volume under the title of "What Christians Believe." The author was a Methodist Episcopal clergyman of Oswego, N. Y., who had delivered a series of lectures to his people on the denominations of Christendom. The object of this pastor, Miles G. Bullock, Ph. D., was not controversy, but the imparting of information. He strove to put himself as far as possible in the place of the Romanist, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Baptist, the Congregationalist, the Lutheran, the Universalist and the Methodist, and to set forth clearly and impartially the belief of each. He has done this so successfully, that the reader would be puzzled to know what was the religious belief of the author if the title-page had not informed him. A Baptist could hardly have stated the position of his denomination more clearly. Our distinctive principles are so uniformly misstated or ridiculed by Pedobaptists that a candid and appreciative statement of them is always worthy of mention. Dr. Bullock, after quite an extended paraphrase of the New-Hampshire Articles of Faith, sums things up thus: "Now summarize a little. A Baptist maintains that only believers are to be baptized; hence infant baptism is nonsense; baptism is baptism only by immersion; baptized believers only have any right to the Lord's Supper.

How can they therefore, consistently, invite or allow me, having only been sprinkled, and that in infancy, to commune with them? Do they keep me away from the Lord's table, or is it I who am responsible for neglect of this sacrament, having refused to comply with the essential condition of its reception?

Close Communion, as it is generally termed, is the only logical and consistent course for Baptist churches to pursue. If their premises are right, the conclusion is surely just as it should be.

Such a frank admission is not often heard from Pedo-Baptist lips, namely, that the real question at issue between Baptists and their opponents is the nature and subjects of baptism.

But Dr. Bullock is quite as candid on still another point. Baptists have always insisted that they were no more "close" in their communion theory than other evangelical denominations, which refuse to invite other than baptized persons to the Lord's table. This assertion is often called in question. We Baptists are declared to be more "close" than Pedobaptists in this matter, because we refuse to invite immersed believers who are members of Pedo-baptist churches. On this point hear our Methodist brother again:—

"But," says one, whose prejudices are all awake. "Why will they not commune with those believers in other churches who have been immersed?"

For the consistent reason that such persons have violated the New Testament order in communing with unbaptized believers, and are therefore not considered in good standing. They do not feel willing to countenance such laxity in Christian discipline.

Let us honor them for stern steadfastness in maintaining what they believe to be a Bible precept, rather than criticize and censure, because they differ with us concerning the intent and mode of Christian baptism, and believe it to be an irrevocable condition of coming to the Lord's Supper."

This puts the matter clearly and plainly so that there is no dodging the issue. Neither Baptists nor Pedobaptists make baptism the sole pre-requisite to the Lord's table—but baptism and an orderly walk. What Pedobaptist church, for example, would invite Roman Catholics to the Lord's table, even if there was any probability that the latter would accept? But why not, if baptism is the only pre-requisite? The Catholic has been baptized according to the Pedobaptist standard of baptism. The reason is that the Romanist has made such departures from the gospel order as make it necessary for Protestant

churches to decline to have fellowship with his error in this way. For just this reason, and no other, Baptists do not feel warranted in inviting to the Lord's table those who so far "walk disorderly" as to have fellowship with those who make void the ordinances of God by the traditions of men. In this respect, as in all others, Baptists are just as 'close' as other Christians, and not one whit closer. One Pedobaptist, at least has had the wit to see it and the fairness to acknowledge it. That he should have many imitators it is only reasonable to expect after so much light has been shed upon this question. And yet the darkness that obtains in some quarters is deep and dense.

Editorial Notes.

—We need not be ashamed to give a five cent bit to the cause of Christ if that is all we have to give. Given in love, God will magnify it into dollars, and make it potential in its errand of goodwill to men. We need not hesitate to perform the humblest service in Christ's name, for he will take it and glorify it, and make it a blessing to us and to others. It is the use to which we put our one talent which makes all the difference in the world as to the Lord's estimate. It is not and never will be the question of one or ten, but what have you done with either. We are only responsible for what we have and what we use. But let us remember that we are responsible for these.

—"Appeals to give to missions in general, to missionary societies, 'to the cause' should be made to mature minds, and made without cost or hypocrisy. If too great emphasis is placed upon the fact that it is 'the Lord's work' the logical Christian will be tempted to say 'Then let him do it.' That is not where Christ placed the emphasis. He laid the responsibility on the church. Missions is no more God's work than politics or trade or science or art. Missions is the work of the church, and the church will be held responsible for results." The truth contained in the above extract is frequently overlooked by the average church member and sometimes by the average pastor. Brethren get into line. Get hold of the rope and pull together."

—The following is apt and to the point. The lesson is worth learning. Clothes never make the man. The best broad cloth is no index of what it covers. "A Scottish nobleman once seeing an old gardener of his establishment with a somewhat threadbare coat, made some passing remark on its condition. 'It's a verra guld coat,' said the honest old man. 'I cannot agree with you there,' said his lordship. 'Ay, it's a verra guld coat,' persisted the old man; it carries a contented spirit and a body that owes no man anything, and that's mair than mony a man can say of his coat." There are men walking our streets who affect to despise their neighbors, whose dress is plain and coarse, but paid for. What a man is, is of more account than what he wears.

—Mr. Cuyler tells the following, "While travelling in a coal mine district I noticed how very dingy the town appeared. The coal dust seemed to blacken buildings, trees, shrubs, everything. But as a foreman and I were walking near the mines, I noticed a beautiful white flower. Its petals were as pure as if it were blooming in a daisy field. 'What care the owner of this plant must take of it,' said I, 'to keep it so free from dust and dirt.' 'See here,' said the foreman, and taking up a handful of coal dust, he threw it over the flower. It immediately fell off, and left the flower as stainless as before. 'It has an enamel' the foreman explained, 'which prevents any dust from clinging to it. I think it must have been created for just such a place.' It is just so with the Christian in this world. He is in it but not of it—"Unspotted from the world." What a calling!

—A young man recently chose a certain line of religious work, and when asked why he did so, replied, "Because I think I can best serve my Saviour by so doing." Men were surprised at the answer, and equally to find this man striving to lead others to make a like resolve. "Serving the Lord" meant something to him. It surely meant something to those men who left all to follow the Christ, when he was here on earth. In the choice of a calling in life how few there are who ask the question, "How can I best serve the Lord in reaching a decision?" The same thing applies in choosing a place to live and work. Men seldom ask, "Is it the best place to do the Master's bidding?" Is it not always, "Where can I make the best living, meaning thereby, the most money?" The Master said "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." Is the disciple above his Lord in this matter?

—Here is Prof. Blackie's tribute to his friend John McNeill:
"Well, here's a man who knows what preaching means—
Not nice phrase to make a sounding show,
As studied player struts before the scenes,
But with a weighty arm, blow upon blow
To smite each crested sinner's haughty head,
Direct from God. The time had need of such
Mid scenes of Godless people widely spread.