

both caution at the beginning and faithfulness subsequently—the door open to all and all disclaiming to be the “brother’s keeper,” there will inevitably be an influx of unconverted people and no difference between the church and the world. Perhaps the only distinction being that the church is more worldly than the world itself.

Personal and private dealing can accomplish very much, we grant, and in the exercise of discipline it is of course presumed and required that we be governed by no vindictive spirit, and that any suspension or other course have in view the repentance and holier life of the person disciplined. Let every church face this question honestly. The point to be aimed at is a discipline of members that is real purifying and ennobling.

This is the more excellent way. What is the use of allowing longer the pretence of fallible inquisitors or examiners professing to sift the *inward characters* of men and women as they stand at the portals of the church. Courageous and christian treatment afterward is the only effectual way of making and keeping pure the society of Jesus. On motives good or bad at entrance we are not able to decide. The fruit that is produced in after days we are justified in judging.

Now the great practical difficulty before those who have the care of the churches is to determine what are and what are not proper occasions for the exercise of discipline. What ought to be done with the extortionate shopkeeper, the railing idler, the house to house mischief-maker, the disgraceful-failing bankrupt—the manufacturer or manufacturer whose capital is the heart blood of poor pale consumptives, the foul-hearted and filthy-tongued, the plausible apologist for and greedy trafficker in that vile trade that destroys innumerable bodies and souls in hell. Are these fit subjects for righteous and holy discipline? How long will a healthy christian church tolerate in its bosom such open transgressors? if sound and healthy, must not the body purge out the leaven of evil.

True, we cannot hope to reach absolute perfection here. It is also admitted freely that a Christly compassion for the sinner becomes us all, seeing that the lives of the best among us are so incomplete and poor. But surely all church discipline is not to be overthrown, and “let-alone-ism” be the universal remedy. The tyrant’s rod is better banished. The law of force is suspended. The law of love is that to which christians are to be loyal. But are our churches loyal to this law? What is so severe, what is so imperious as love? Was it not out of the largest and most loving human heart God ever made that the admonition came that is written for us in clear and unmistakable terms in I. Cor., 5, 11.—“But now I write unto you *not to keep company* if

any man that is named a broker be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such a one not to eat. For what have I to do with judging them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away the wicked man from among yourselves.”

Looking thus at home how true are Bengel’s words, that “not alone at the love feasts or in private intercourse but in the church’s communion the members are not as children in one family, but like a heterogeneous crowd of strangers in an inn.”

We narrow down the apostolic prohibition to mean non-association only as to those who “sin against themselves,” whereas he puts on the same plane those who openly sin against their neighbors and the idolators against God, the people who turn away from Him to fill themselves with the inferior objects of sense.”

We need not be anxious to arrive at the precise framework of the New Testament plan, but it becomes us to bring back our conduct to the changeless revealed principles of the will of God. As Milton wrote of the apostasy of his day our chief concern should be not weighing the Scripture in the balance of our methods, but rather the weighing of our ways in the balance of Scripture.

Corruption and apostasy will creep in by degrees if we care only for the number of our members and not their piety and Godly power. If the popularity of the public standing of our churches be the standard then we shall be remarkable speedily not for the presence but the absence of him who affirms “I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men that are thickened on their lees—(hardened because undisturbed in their carnal ease,) Zeph. 1 : 12:

Not therefore in censoriousness does the writer ask that we give more heed to the Divine call to uncorruptness. We do not join in the general moan about the glory having all gone from out our churches, nor do we share in the unwholesome suspicion that there is no cause why we should longer possess a portion of the land. A bare testimony to Congregationalism is certainly not worth living for, but so long as our people take their firm stations under the white standard of the gospel in its simplicity and sincerity we have good hope that nothing will ever arise to demand that our churches and their ministry be dissolved, nay rather we are sure that they shall live in the name of all truth and reality and nobleness until once and forever the day of perfect purity has dawned upon the sons of God.

The world is made up of trifles. Don’t allow yourself to be ruffled by them. If you do, you’ll never have a moment’s peace.