

THE

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## CHRIST-LESS POLITICS.

In the January number we wrote on The Nation and Christ, instancing wherein the president, though a Christian and an elder in the Presbyterian church, formally refused to refer to Christ in his Thanksgiving proclamation of November last. The excuse he made was that to do so would not be in harmony with our institutions. Of course, this means the Constitution as thereby his official duty is determined. Many who would concede but little to a Covenanter as to the nation's sin, know well the gravity of this refusal.

Another token of the nation's unfaithfulness to the God of revelation has been given. The postmaster-general is also a Christian and an elder in the Presbyterian church. He was in early life the Philadelphia Y. M. C. A. secretary, and is a well-known "Christian worker." At the Pittsburgh meeting of the Western Penna. Sabbath Association, on November 19th, the "Sunday paper" was under discussion, and the duty of the church to free herself from sin in this matter was pressed. One of the speakers took occasion to say that great as was that evil, the "Sunday mail" service was greater, and at the head of this department was this well-known Christian. What should his church do? the speaker asked. Why was he not brought under her discipline? These remarks being brought to the official's attention, he said in reply in substance, that the mail cars could not be stopped without great hazard to the mail at points on the road, that if a whole community petitioned the department to close its post office on the Sabbath, the request would be granted, and that the wishes of Christians were not alone to be consulted in this matter. There is no doubt that many, may we not say, most Christians rest satisfied with such answers to a law of God. The many feel that the Sabbath rest cannot now be conceded to the vast army of railway and mail employes. What an attitude to a *divine* command! Formerly the Sabbath laws of

Again in 1836 they say: "Let this assembly do their whole duty; let them lift up a voice of strength; let them send out a loud note of alarm; let them determine in the strength of the Lord, to carry out in their practical relation to the Sabbath the true principles of Christian discipline and the whole church may be cleansed, the Sabbath reinstated, and this great and guilty nation saved." The assembly of 1873 re-affirmed the declarations of previous assemblies regarding the sacredness of the Sabbath. See the digest of 1890. Pages 759-766. What do we now see? the offices of the chief magistrate and the postmaster-general in the ordering of God filled by men who are members and office-bearers of that church. They fall in with the evil and feel themselves as powerless as the Alpine vil-  
lager beneath the avalanche, or the unhappy victim caught in the wheel of a mighty engine. The salt has lost its savour. What do we look for? Divine judgments; judgment on the nation—but not to our destruction. The witnesses for God are increasing. This we declare, even though among us there are signs of weakening in our protest. The foundation of God standeth sure. W.

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## CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

BY REV. D. S. FARIS.

The question now agitating the Reformed Presbyterian church is mainly one of discipline. Two theories are advocated. First, that only the violation of essential principles is relevant to censure. That we have no right to proceed against persons, believed in the judgment of charity, to be in Christ and members of the invisible church. The second, which I propose to prove that true believers are the proper subjects of discipline, that disobedience to Christ and his church is the offense, and that the reformation of the offender is the end.

I. As to the proper subjects, the scriptures are explicit that the church has nothing to do by way of judgment with the professed unbeliever. "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without?" I. Cor. 5: 12. Rulers cannot determine the spiritual state of professors, so to say certainly this one is in Christ and that one is not. The tares and the wheat must grow together until the great day of separation. The reason of censure therefore is not that a person gives evidence that he is not received by Christ. Those that Christ has received are entitled to the care of under shepherds to admonish and rebuke them. Excommunication is the only judicial act that is based on the supposition or belief that the subject is not a true Christian. But this is not properly discipline, it is casting out, cutting off and delivering up to Satan. Yet even in this case the salvation of the offender is sought, but as of an unregenerate person. The subject of this punishment must have been guilty of gross crime, persisted in after a due course of discipline,

which in spite of charity, compels the belief that he has not in heart embraced Christ. This matter has nothing to do with the present discussion.

A church of real saints is an enthusiast's utopia. There can be no such thing in this imperfect state. The utmost purity we can hope for is a church of *visible* saints, that is of members who profess to believe and obey the truth and maintain a character becoming godliness. Such persons are not without sins and faults, but their life upon the whole appears to be sincere. Besides sins of infirmity, sincere members of the church may be guilty of sins that are scandalous. Such sins are so called because they are liable to cause others to stumble and offend. Discipline is designed to correct scandals. The subject is a professed Christian, whom we are bound to esteem and admonish as a brother. The censures of the church are for her members, as the rod in the family is for the children and not for strangers. The latter, if unruly, are to be cast out, cut off, delivered up; but the children are to be corrected, cherished, and brought up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.'

The form of church government teaches that persons not yet cast out of the church may be suspended from privileges. True believers are sometimes guilty of gross sins, which require temporary suspension, that they may have time to prove their repentance and reformation. It is not because they are believed to be insincere in their profession; but because they have scandalized their brethren and fallen from their own attainments. The censure is designed to make them ashamed, and not to declare them out of the brotherhood. II. Thess. 3; 14, 15 "Note that man and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." The howl that is set up in the world, and sometimes in the church, because we will not receive them that Christ has received, is a howl of ignorance. It is because we will not reject them that Christ has received, that we admonish, rebuke, and even suspend them for the time. Loath to give up those, who in the judgment of charity, must be esteemed as brethren, we censure them and labor for their reformation. But here we meet a difficulty arising from sects in the church. For many acts of disobedience to Christ, some evangelical body will condone the offense and stay the effect of censure. Suspension often fails to make the offender ashamed, because he gets countenance elsewhere. One evil, however, does not justify another. We must go by the rule of faith and practice, the word of God, though others set it aside.

II. Disobedience to Christ and his church is the nature of the offenses relevant to censure. Our contention is no doubt chiefly on this point. There are two opinions, the plausible and popular opinion of those that contend that only sins against the essentials of our holy religion are to be disciplined—other sins they claim must be passed as proceeding from infirmity, or because they are of such

a nature that men cannot judge them. Others, and they are in the minority, take the ground that every *overt* disobedience to Christ or his church, is censurable. It is scarcely worth while to say that this has always been both the doctrine and practice of the Reformed Presbyterian church. But as the doctrine and practice of the church is lightly esteemed by many as mere human opinion, I will not wait to show that this is the law and testimony of the fathers, but proceed at once to the proof from the Supreme standard, the word of God, "To the law and to the testimony if they speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8; 20.

The first Christian council, Acts 15 chap. made ordinances that were delivered to every congregation to 'keep.' Acts 16; 4. They enjoined Christians to abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication. Acts 15: 29. The last named sin is one directly against the moral law, the others are only constructively so, yet all are prohibited by the same decree side by side with that which is a crime that excludes from the kingdom of God. The eating of things strangled and of blood is perfectly indifferent in a moral point of view; but since it caused offense and stumbling to the Jews, the Gentiles were required to abstain. The eating of things offered in sacrifice to idols Paul makes indifferent. Were these things essential to salvation? Paul says no. The idol is nothing; the meat offered in sacrifice to idols, makes him that has knowledge, neither better nor worse. But every one has not that knowledge, and the strong must bear the burden of the weak. I Cor. chap. 8. After the same example we would censure a man for taking a dram of liquor, not because we suppose that total abstinence is essential to the man's salvation, but because his example will ensnare the weak. The Head of the church himself condemns two of the churches of Asia because they tolerated them that held and taught the use of meat offered in sacrifice to idols, and thus puts the stamp of his approbation on the decree of the church. That which in itself is nothing becomes a great sin, when it causes offense to a weak brother. It is the church's duty to declare such things sinful according to the general principles of the word of God; and then to proceed against the insubordinate who will not obey or keep the decrees of the church. Now as the ordinance commanding to abstain from blood, &c., was to be kept even as the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment we have conclusive proof, that discipline is applicable to all overt disobedience to Christ and his church.

Disobedience is the thing named as the cause for withdrawing fellowship. II. Thess. 3: 14, "And if any man *obey* not our word by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him." In the sixth verse we read "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." Verse 11, "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies."

Disobedience is the charge, and 'working not at all,' and 'being busy-bodies,' are the specifications. Such offenses are against the practice, but not against the essentials of religion, except in so far as every thing that Christ commands us to believe or do is essential. Indeed, in this sense, every thing is essential that belongs to the faith or practice of the church. Hence the use of the term is deceptive. I have used it as a synonym of 'fundamental.' What is essential to the Christian religion, if taken from it, would make it something else than what it is. The specifications above under consideration are offenses against the eighth and perhaps the ninth commandment, by way of direct inference. They are violations of the law of God, and therefore they are censurable.

The same thing may be argued from Heb. 13: 17. "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves." In what?

There is no limitation except 'in the Lord,' which may be supplied from other places. Obedience is due in all that Christ requires, either by express command or by direct inference. It is not the relative importance of the thing commanded or forbidden, but the fact that a violation of the rule, is rejecting and trampling on the authority of God. We may no more violate the law of God in its lesser provisions than in its greater. The only question is whether the thing charged be a violation of the law or not. Some sins are more aggravated than others. *Larger Catechism*, Q. 151. This gives rise to different degrees of censure, as admonition, rebuke and suspension. Refusal to submit to the lower censures calls for the higher. Suspension thus often follows an offense that would call for no more than the lowest censure. This brings us again to the point that insubordination or disobedience requires withdrawal of fellowship, that is temporary suspension. The disobedience which brought death into the world; was not the violation of God's law in a thing in itself wrong. The eating of the forbidden fruit aside from the prohibition was indifferent. But being forbidden, the act was despite to the authority of God. By this our disobedience sin came into the world, and death by sin. If God should tolerate disobedience in that which is least, his authority would be broken down as to the whole law. James 2: 10, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all; for he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill." Hence the relative importance of the principle violated, is not the thing that makes the act sinful, but the contempt of the Divine authority. Accordingly Paul says: II. Cor. 10: 6, "And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience," not disobedience in the *greater* matters of the law, but in *all*. Governors of families and teachers find the unruly attempting to break down authority by little acts of disobedience. Even a child knows that authority breaks down piece-meal, as a stone wall crumbles little by little when hammered by a battery. If the teacher or parent has allowed for a time the undermining of authority, this makes it harder, but none the less a duty, to put a stop to the insubordination.

In Romans 16: 17, Paul says, "Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." The charge is forming parties to oppose the doctrines of the church.

Parties in the church to hold and propagate errors against her testimony is rank disobedience and insubordination. It is schism in the body. The toleration of it must be fatal. We have seen from Rev. 2; 14, 15, 20, that having in fellowship those that hold or teach error is condemned as criminal by the final judge. How much more when parties are formed to propagate views subversive of the testimony of the church? This scripture lays the obligation on the church to avoid such as pursue devious courses. The rulers must take the matter in hand, and mark by censure the guilty parties, that the private members may know whom to avoid.

In I. Tim., 6 chap., the apostle lays down the general rules applicable to the relation of master and servant, both in those times when servitude was involuntary, and in these times when voluntary contract is the basis of the obligation. These rules evidently embrace the subordinate principles of law, and teach us to apply the law in all the diversity of practical cases that arise under it. Those that taught otherwise were "proud knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, &c.; from such withdraw thyself." The persistent violation of these subordinate rules of Christian life is to be followed by *suspension* from privileges. The Christian life is one of holy obedience to Christ in submission to them that are over us in the Lord.

Resisting the authority of the church in any thing contained in her profession or practice, is disorderly and censurable. If the profession is found to be wrong, the honest way is to recant and abandon it. To make a solemn agreement to be obedient to the faith and practice of the church, and afterward to claim the right to interpret any part of that compact contrary to the sense of the church imposing the vows is double dealing of the worst sort. It is speaking or vowing with a heart and a heart to God. It is a Jesuitical method of assailing the truth. The right is claimed in the name of *liberty*. But liberty is not to be plead after making engagements. We have liberty as far as our fellow man is concerned, until we voluntarily bind ourselves. A woman married to a husband cannot claim liberty. Rom. 7: 2, 3, "Then she is bound so that if she be married to another she shall be called an adulteress." Exactly so, a non professor is free from the law of the church, but when a person has joined the church, and then takes liberty, he is a covenant breaker. It matters not what part of the testimony he takes exception to; whether in things great or small. The crime is taking exception at all, and denying the obligation as understood at the time of taking it. But what should a person do who finds that he has taken a wrong obligation? Break it, of course. But do not deny the taking of it. Vows if found to be unlawful are

not to be kept. It is a sin to keep that which it was wrong to engage to perform. It takes two to make a bargain. Both parties must consent before it is set aside. It is, therefore, clearly the duty of those that consider the church's testimony and practice, in anything wrong and unscriptural, to withdraw from the body. It is just as clearly the duty of the body to withdraw fellowship from those that have promised obedience, but refuse any longer to submit to her order.

The violation of one's engagements to the church is no trivial matter.

Every one coming into the church, but especially ministers, come under solemn engagements to obey Christ and his church—Christ as the authority and the church as the administrator in behalf of Christ. Matt. 18: 17, "Tell it unto the church, and if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee a heathen man and a publican." Matt. 16: 18, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." These and other texts show the propriety of such promises of subjection to the church. The engagements being broken, what shall we think of the person who claims the right to dispense with any part of the obligation? There is a time to dispute against the principles of the church, and that is before the vows are taken. If contention come afterward, it is disobedience to the church—it is a violation of our plighted faith—it is *breach of contract*. The men of the world strongly condemn such conduct in business matters, while they applaud those that claim liberty to disregard obligation to the church. Such conduct is not *liberty*, but *licentiousness*.

The scriptures require the officers to use discipline to correct offences. It is in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, and in fidelity to their ordination vows that the rulers proceed against disorderly persons. In Rom. 16: 17, Paul says, "I beseech you brethren." In II. Thess. 3: 6, he says, "Now we command you brethren in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. And in Rev. 2: 14 and 20 he that hath the sharp sword with two edges, and his eyes like unto a flame of fire, charges guilt upon the church that retains in her fellowship persons that hold and teach error.

In I. Tim. 5: 20 and 21, Paul says, "Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear. I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things, without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." The rulers of the church not only may, but they must call to account offenders, great or small, or become guilty themselves before the judge of all. Rev. 2: 16, "Repent or else I will come unto thee quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Rev. 2: 16, "And I will kill her children with death."

To the Reformed Presbyterian Church it is a matter of life or death. Insubordination must go down, or the church must die.

III. The end of church discipline is mainly the reformation of the offender. Yet we must not lose sight of the glory of God, whose authority is to be maintained, and who has instituted discipline and required rulers to use it. Nor must we lose sight of the wholesome effect on the members of the church when they see and fear, nor of the purity of ordinances, which must not be profaned by the touch of the unholy, nor of the respect that the world will have for the church, when her members by discipline are trained to a life and character above suspicion. We may sum it all up by saying that the end is the glory of God by the reformation of the offender. This needs no argument further than the presentation of the scripture proofs. Heb. 3: 17, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you." II. Thess. 3: 14 and 15, "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Jude 23, "And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garments spotted by the flesh." Levit. 19: 17, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor and not suffer sin upon him." Censures are generally ascribed to malice by insubordinate subjects of discipline, and the worldly-minded in the church and without, take up the refrain and raise an outcry long and loud against the faithful servants of Christ. But if rulers meet nothing from the world to encourage them to be faithful; they have at least the approbation of conscience and the promise of Christ, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."

## I M P U T A T I O N .

BY REV. SAMUEL R. KERR, A. M.

[Continued from page 59.]

We derive a second argument in support of our doctrine from the fact that all men are naturally under the curse of the law on account of Adam's sin. That this is the condition of all men in their natural state, is evident from the testimony of the Scriptures respecting them. "He that believeth on him," says John, "is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already." (John 3: 18.) And again, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8: 1.) From these passages it is evident that all unbelievers, all who are not in Christ Jesus, are under condemnation. Nor is there anything here which requires us to limit these declarations to such as have actually sinned in their own persons. They who are guilty of actual