

THE EVANGELICAL REPOSITORY.

FIRST SERIES.
VOL. LXIII.—No. 5 }

OCTOBER, 1886.

{ FOURTH SERIES
VOL. XIII.—No. 5

THE LAW OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERLY LOVE: ITS NATURE AND APPLICATION.

An obligation rests on men, irrespectively of rank, race or religious profession, to love one another. The true "Master of Sentences" has analyzed and summarized for our instruction the moral law, reducing it to two heads, of which one enjoins love to God; the other, love to man.

Within the limits of this general obligation to love our neighbor, there are certain grades, or degrees, of love required, according to the greater or less intimacy of relations subsisting between men. Thus there is room for a special love to those who are of our immediate kin, household or country. There is accordingly an obligation resting upon Christians as such to love one another. This is known as the obligation to "brotherly kindness," or to "love of the brethren." Even within this more general obligation to brotherly love, degrees are admissible. For instance, those who are united in a common profession of the truth are under an increased bond to cherish toward each other this peculiar love.

In the Church of Christ, viewed as a visible organization, as well as between individual Christians, this law should have sway. This law, regulative of the feeling and demeanor of Christians toward each other, does not, however, require any winking at the errors or faults of fellow-Christians. To be silent touching such aberrations is the sign of hatred rather than of love. Long ago was it authoritatively said (Lev. 19: 17), "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him." "Charity (or love) rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

One of the requirements of this law of love is, that in matters deemed by them indifferent, Christians abstain from any practice which would be grieving or ensnaring to fellow-Christians, especially of the same denominational fold. This does not imply that we are bound by the law in question to refrain from using, in a kind way, arguments to lead our scrupulous brethren to views which appear to us more enlightened and scriptural. The law under consideration forbids us to persist in a practice, if not required by conscience to pursue it, which would subject our brethren to pain and peril. And it forbids us on the ground that we should not wantonly cause pain to any one, and that to embolden or induce any one by our conduct to do something in itself indifferent of which his conscience at the time does not approve, is a sin. See Rom. 14: 14, 15, 22, 23. It may be a

reason of gladness if we have so far succeeded in enlightening a man that he no longer scruples to do a thing which we deem lawful; but it would be a reason of sorrow if we should induce a man in matters intrinsically indifferent to trample upon his conscience.

Still more imperative is it that Christians abstain in matters of indifference from *forcing* upon fellow-Christians that to which the latter have a conscientious repugnance. If, for instance, one of those in the Apostolic Church who had no scruples about eating meat offered to idols, should have insisted that other Christians who had scruples on this head must also eat of such meat, he would have been guilty of a peculiarly gross violation of the law of love.

This law of brotherly consideration and forbearance may and should be sustained and enforced in the Church by discipline. This is a point to which some demur, who readily accept the general principles already presented. It is contended that compliance with the requirements of this law must be unforced and spontaneous; that while the church officers may counsel and urge compliance, they exceed their powers when they undertake, by judicial discipline, to enforce it.

On the other hand, it is maintained that, while it pertains not to church officers to compel those under their care to love one another, inasmuch as love must, by its very nature, be free, never the product of compulsion; and inasmuch as it is not the prerogative of one man to take cognizance of the heart of another, unless its state be discovered by outward acts, yet church officers may, by a resort to discipline, if need be, restrain church members from acting toward each other in an unbrotherly way, and even compel them to treat each other externally with Christian courtesy.

That this latter position is countenanced by our standards, supreme and subordinate, admits of satisfactory proof.

First. The definition given in our "Book of Government and Discipline" of an ecclesiastical offense, that is of an offense which falls within the sphere of which church officers have cognizance, favors this position. "An offense," it is said, "is anything in the *avowed* belief, or in the *practice* of a church member, which is contrary to the word of God and the standards of the Church, or which in its nature and circumstances is calculated to lead others into sin." Now our General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that the law of brotherly love is binding upon church members individually. When, therefore, this law is *practically*, or *externally*, violated by any of them, an offense has been committed of which the officers of the church have cognizance, and for the removal or correction of which, so far as discipline can do it, they are responsible.

Second. It is difficult to perceive why outward violations of the law of brotherly love should be exempted from the judicial dealing which the officers of the church are warranted and required to use in reference to all other outward forms of disobedience to the law of God. Is the discrimina-

tion made on the ground that transgressions against the "royal law of love" are comparatively trifling and of minor obliquity? The notion that they are is surely forbidden by the solemn utterances of our Lord: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another"; "This is my commandment, That ye love another, as I have loved you"; "These things I command you, That ye love one another," and by numerous statements, exhortations and injunctions addressed to Christians in the inspired epistles, particularly those of Paul and John. Is the distinction made on the ground that the law in question is a law of *love*? The fact that it is so called will not prove that it may not be enforced by discipline; for the entire moral law is a law of love, and love is declared to be "the fulfilling of the law."

Of course our inability to discover the reason, or reasons, why violations of the law of love should not, equally with other sins, expose the offenders to the discipline of the Church, would not justify us in denying that such a distinction among sins should be made, provided that we had evidence that God had made the distinction in question. But evidence to this effect we know not where to find. Not only this; but, as we judge, there is evidence to the contrary in the Scriptures, a part of which evidence will now be offered.

Third. In the Apostolic Church, and with apostolic approval, violations of the law of brotherly love were regarded as a just ground of ecclesiastical censure.

A particular account is given in Acts 15 of the manner in which the "Synod of Jerusalem," as Presbyterian writers have been wont to call the meeting, dealt with a controversy which had arisen in the Church touching the relation of Gentile Christians to Jewish ordinances. Certain professing Christians, deeply tinctured with Pharisaic sentiments, had caused disturbances in the Church at Antioch by urging that converts from the Gentile population must, at the peril of their salvation should they disobey, be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law. "And certain brethren which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised, after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." After much discussion of the point thus mooted, it was agreed that the difficulty be referred for settlement to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, certain delegates being at the same time appointed to represent the Church of Antioch in the expected Assembly.

The decision of the Synod was in substance this: That no Gentile convert was under obligation to observe any part of the distinctively Jewish ritual as necessary to his salvation; but that, as a measure of charitable conciliation toward the Judaists, the Gentile converts should abstain not only from fornication, a sin closely connected with the prevalent idolatry, but also from things offered to idols, from things strangled, and from blood.

The three things last named were in themselves indifferent, as Paul clearly teaches in Rom. 14 : 14, 17, 20 ; 1 Cor. 8 : 4, 8. Why then were they prohibited to Gentile Christians ? Simply in pursuance of the law of love. Had they asserted their liberty practically, their Jewish brethren might have been grieved and alienated, and in some cases, perhaps, emboldened to use things without feeling clear in conscience that it was right to use them.

But perhaps the Synod, or Council, intended the decision given to be merely advisory and hortatory, not mandatory. This supposition is inadmissible, because the directions given are described by the Synod itself as "necessary things," and as a "burden" laid upon the Gentile Christians ; while, besides, the decisions rendered are characterized in Acts 16 : 4 as "decrees," the Greek word "dogmata," so rendered being the one used to denote the mandates of the Roman emperor and the Mosaic ordinances, which certainly were meant to be enforced. (See Luke 2 : 1 ; Acts 17 : 7 ; Eph. 2 : 15 ; Col. 2 : 14.)

Thus light is shed upon the method in which the law of love was administered in the Apostolic Church, and ground afforded for the belief that ecclesiastical discipline may, when exhortation fails, be employed to enforce it. Of course the prohibition which we have been considering, so far as pertained to the things intrinsically indifferent, was meant to be but temporary ; yet it was intended to be in force so long as the occasion for it existed, while the principle underlying it is of permanent authority and importance.

But it is alleged that the view we take of the application of this law of Christian brotherhood is at variance with the teaching and conduct of the Apostle Paul. Particularly, his words contained in Rom. 14 : 2 : "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not ; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth : for God hath received him," together with his conduct as described in Gal. 2 : 3-5, are adduced as proof that this Apostle regarded the law of love in a very different light from that in which we have now presented it.

So far as Rom. 14 : 2 is concerned, we see no ground for this assertion. In the passage referred to, Paul is seeking to modify and moderate the temper of the two parties in view, denominated respectively, "the strong" and "the weak." It would seem that the strong were disposed to treat with contempt the scrupulous brethren as narrow-minded, while admitting that they were, perhaps, friends of Christ. The weak, or scrupulous, on the contrary appear to have been inclined to question altogether the Christianity of the strong and to rate them as little better than baptized heathen. This tendency of the scrupulous, the Apostle styles "judging." But the fact that he forbids *such* "judging" does not imply a prohibition of the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline for the correction of open and continued violations of the law of brotherly love, any more than our Lord's command,

"Judge not that ye be not judged," forbids the administration of church censures. If the theory of communion which our Church maintains is correct, it may be proper and, at times, a duty to inflict censure, even to the extent of suspension from sealing ordinances, upon one who is still deemed a Christian. The infliction of ecclesiastical censure may be entirely warrantable in many cases in which the judgment that he on whom the censure falls is not a Christian would be utterly unwarrantable.

But it is said that the Apostle Paul himself in his dealings with Jewish Christians did not yield a jot of Christian liberty in consideration of the law of love, and that in Gal. 2 : 3-5 and elsewhere he glories in this fact. Hence it is argued that the "strong," so called, are not under obligation to treat with gentle consideration in matters of indifference the scruples of their brethren.

This line of argument, however, is not very safe or conclusive. Are we to understand that there is no law of love to regulate the demeanor of Christians toward each other? Few will say so; and our General Assembly has frequently acknowledged the existence and authority of such a law. Are we to understand that the Apostle Paul never inculcated the duty upon Christians of abstaining in matters indifferent from conduct offensive and ensnaring, not to say overbearing and tyrannical, toward one another? Who can think so that reads attentively his epistles?

Are we then to understand that in practice he contradicted his own teaching, and gloried moreover in so doing? This supposition is inadmissible.

The principle which shows the consistency of Paul's conduct at one time with his conduct at another, and of his conduct with his teaching, it is not difficult to discover. So long as condescension to the scruples of Jewish Christians was sought on the ground of love to them and of a desire to avoid leading them to defy their own conscience, Paul was most ready to yield in matters indifferent; but whenever the claim was set up that conformity to the Jewish ritual was essential to salvation, he utterly refused concession.

The foregoing discussion has been studiously abstract. Let us now suggest a practical application of the results reached to the music difficulty with which our Church has now for years been agitated. And as this article has already exceeded the limits as to length originally projected, I will set down with great brevity and under numerical notation the main thoughts which present themselves.

1. There are two parties in our Church, one, the Instrumentalist, the other, the Anti-instrumentalist party.

2. The one party contends for the liberty, under certain restrictions, to use in worship instrumental music. The other party is opposed to such usage and that on the ground that in the New Testament Church instrumental music in worship is destitute of divine appointment. To the one

this music is a matter of indifference or, at least, only of preference. To the other, it is a matter of serious objection.

3. The law of love dictates, as we think, that the first party abstain in these circumstances from using the liberty in this matter to which abstractly they may consider themselves to be entitled. Especially is this their duty in view of the fact that by insisting on the full use of their liberty, they would not only grieve many brethren, but also tempt them to disregard conscience, and even compel them to sanction that against which their conscience reclaims as a corruption of worship. This is as if Jewish Christians, who had scruples about eating blood or things strangled, had been compelled by their Gentile brethren to eat those articles.

4. In a Presbyterian denomination, the same law of brotherly regard which would exclude instruments from one congregation would exclude them from all the congregations.

5. The law of love may, and if needful, should be enforced by the discipline of the Church. Our preceding discussion bears on this point peculiarly.

6. There are several circumstances which contribute to render in the case under consideration a resort to judicial discipline seemly, if other means fail. Prominent among these circumstances are the following:

(1) The Church unquestionably had a constitutional law prohibitory of the use of instrumental music in worship.

(2) The vast majority of all the present members of the Church were received into communion while prohibition of instrumental music in worship was undoubtedly the law of the Church. To this feature of our profession in common with other features of it, assent must have been given, according to our law for admitting members.

(3) There is a conviction on the part of very many in the Church that the explicit prohibition referred to has not been constitutionally repealed.

(4) Many, also, are firmly convinced that even the repeal of that prohibition, however constitutionally effected, would not warrant the use of instrumental music in any of our congregations. An overture either positively enjoining or expressly permitting the use in question, it is held, must be issued and carried before instrumental music can have any ecclesiastical right to a place in our worship.

(5) The employment of instrumental music in our worship amounts virtually to a new term of communion; for it implies a declaration that objectors must submit to the arrangement as best they can, or else withdraw from the Church altogether. Thus that is practically made a term of communion which those who make it so admit is a matter of indifference! Did the anti-instrumentalists contend that the use of instrumental music must be excluded on the ground that no one who uses it in worship can be saved, its advocates might be excused if they resolutely and practically asserted what they count their liberty, but the opponents of this music proceed on no such extravagant and unwarrantable ground.

JAMES HARPER.