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The Mid-week Service.

For a few weeks there has been the annual interruption of regular church work in almost every quarter. With the pastor absent in his brief respite from trying labors, and the people scattered from their homes to various summer resorts, or on visits to friends, the effect is soon apparent. Besides this, the depressing influence of the summer heat unfits those who remain at home for energetic effort, and the temptation is strong to grow careless and neglectful. Even when the spirit is willing, the flesh grows weak. All these causes have their effect on the religious life of the people. With one consent they let everything run down for awhile, and wait till the summer is over to enter again in their work with their accustomed zeal.

Under these circumstances, there is no part of the church work that usually suffers more than the mid-week prayer service. With the attendance at the minimum, it is a most difficult thing to carry it through. Happy are they who do not find it so!

But now the changing seasons will soon drive the excessive heat away, and pastors and people will return and all the wheels of church activity will again be in motion. Is not this a favorable time to consider the importance of the mid-week service, and in every congregation to see how it can be rendered more efficient? There is not enough made of it. It cannot be dispensed with, except with serious loss to any church that will attempt it. It comes between the Sabbaths and makes a break in the worldly influences of the week. It calls every one to turn aside for an hour of prayer and meditation from the busy scenes of life. It is, moreover, a meeting in which the people can take part with the greatest freedom. No other religious service is thrown open as this is, and every one can take part in it. With some it has been the starting point in great usefulness, as they have developed talents lying dormant. It is always the test of the true interest of a church in religion, and it is usually the place where the first sign of a spiritual awakening is seen. No thermometer can give the natural temperature of the church building better than can the church prayer meeting give the spiritual temperature of the hearts of the people. Experienced pastors are quick to discover this. If the prayer meeting is cold and dead, the spiritual life cannot be rising. But when new faces are seen there, and empty places are filled, and new prayers are heard, and new desires are expressed after a closer walk with God, with the spirit of the singing indicating a deeper interest in spiritual things, this all means the presence of the Spirit of God, and those who watch for souls feel that the time to favor Zion is near at hand. To all who would have a ready test of the state of religion, we say watch the prayer meeting closely and you will find that the spiritual life of the church goes up or down with it.

If this is so necessary, how can it be made more efficient? It is worthy of the careful planning of a pastor to make it attractive and profitable. It once differed

from the Sabbath service only in that two or three prayers were offered by the elders present, usually aged men and the pastor did the rest. But a happy change brings the people together to feel that it is their meeting and that it is their privilege to take part in it. It is worthy of careful preparation and planning on the part of the pastor and of faithful attendance on the part of the people. The watchful pastor will seek new helpers constantly. He will call from the Christian Endeavor Society those who have been in training there. Already the question is raised, "What shall be done with the older members of this Society?" They have been active workers for years, but another generation comes forward in whose way they stand and who will excuse themselves, as long as there are older ones for the service. What a happy solution of this whole question would be the annual graduation into the mid-week prayer meeting of those who have outgrown the Christian Endeavor Society, carrying with them the zeal and life they may possess. The object of the Christian Endeavor training is to make young people ready for general church work, and especially for such service as can be rendered, and will be acceptable, in the church prayer meeting. Why should the older ones always remain in the training school? Let them pass on into larger usefulness. The pastor should encourage this, and the older people should show their appreciation when new helpers come to them.

The list of topics prepared carefully and published for the mid-week service is commended as a valuable aid. In our leading church papers help is given every week on the topic for the week following. Those who follow these topics will find them helpful in many ways in making an interesting meeting. Both pastor and people will find help in the discussion which we give of the topic every week in the column under the head of "Mid-week Service." The wide-awake leader will not be at a loss to know how to utilize these helps and turn them to the best account.

Let the mid-week meeting be used wisely and faithfully. It has great possibilities in it for the good of the church that cares for it. It is not intended as a burden for the pastor to anxiously carry, but something in which the people take delight and from which they derive great advantage.

The Elders.

The Presbyterian Church is not governed by her ministers alone, but largely by her elders. These lay officers are numerous and influential. They are usually chosen for their intelligence, wisdom, piety and service. They are considered the most representative members of the respective congregations which they serve. They are entitled to a seat in the higher courts of the Church. They deliberate and vote in the different bodies of which at any time they may form a part. They hold an im-

"Sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6: 3). The teaching delivered to us by the Apostles is to be received as the teaching addressed to us by him, in whose name they spoke. It has the same claim to our acceptance which the living voice of the Master would have.

When, then, we hear the watchword, "Back to Christ," we answer, we do go back to Christ when we hear his inspired messengers. Back of them as human agents we recognize Christ standing with all his authority. Their whole value to us as teachers of religion we carry back to Christ, and we should account ourselves guilty of rejecting Christ if we should refuse to receive and to hear them. Those who imagine that they occupy safe ground in professing to confine their faith to the very sayings that came from the lips of Christ on earth, are really under the influence of the spirit of error. They would do well to lay to heart these solemn words of the Apostle John, which show the untenableness and danger of the position they maintain: "We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4: 6). I do not like to say of my theology that it is Pauline or Johannine. I prefer to ascribe it to my only Master, Christ, whose Spirit took of that which is his and declared it unto both Paul and John.

The Biblical Importance of the Doctrine of Preterition.

By Rev. Geerhardus Vos, D.D.

One of the gravest symptoms of the revision-movement in the Presbyterian Church of to-day consists in the absence of serious appeal to scriptural authority for the changes of Confessional statement that are advocated. From the attitude assumed by many, one would be led to think that no longer the infallible Word of God, but public sentiment, the so-called Christian consciousness, has become the recognized rule of faith among us. Consequently there is reason to fear that the spirit in which revision is sought forebodes greater evil to the Church than any material modifications of the creed to which revision may lead. Even if the Calvinistic system of doctrine embodied in our Standards were seriously mutilated in result of the present movement, so long as the great body of believers feel themselves in conscience bound to yield unquestioning faith to the Bible, there is always hope for a rehabilitation of the principles temporarily abandoned. But, when once the sense of allegiance to the Word of God as the only authoritative rule of faith has become weakened, or, while still recognized in theory has ceased to be a living force in the minds of believers, then the hope of a return to the truth once forsaken is reduced to a minimum.

Among the elements of Calvinistic belief now under attack on account of the popular disfavor into which they have fallen, the doctrine of preterition occupies a conspicuous place. So far as we are aware it is seldom asserted openly, that this doctrine must go, because it has no basis in the Scripture. The worst that thoughtful and theologically informed minds venture to say against it is, that it represents but a logical inference from other truths, and that in such delicate matters the Church may well content itself with summarizing the direct utter-

ances of the Word of God, leaving it to the science of theology to draw the further inferences from these primary data. Even such a statement, however, utterly fails to do justice to the biblical facts. It is true, that the Bible also teaches the principle of preterition, by way of implication, as a corollary of certain other fundamental doctrines. No more is necessary than to combine the two single truths, that all saving grace, inclusive of faith, is the supernatural gift of God, and that not all men are made recipients of this gift, to perceive immediately that the ultimate reason why some are saved and others passed by can lie in God alone. In so far every confession which adheres to these two primary facts—and no Calvinistic Confession could for a moment hesitate to do so—is also bound to imply the doctrine of preterition. But the Scriptures give us much more than indirect warrant for upholding the principle here at issue. In the first place it should be observed that the absoluteness with which the Bible subsumes all events under the sovereign decree of God extend to sinful developments as well as to the morally good activities of men, and that consequently the human unbelief of the Gospel which prevents the salvation of many, is as truly subject to a divine decree as the faith by which others are saved. No matter whether we call this decree an act of preterition, or give it some other name, the general Bible-doctrine on the all-comprehensiveness of the divine decree forces us to recognize it as a reality.

In the second place, the Scriptures speak in particular terms of that part of the divine decree, which has specific reference to the non-salvation of some, terms as strong and unequivocal as any that are used to describe the corresponding act which appoints men unto salvation. It is easy to be misled on this point by the scarcity of biblical statements representing the decree of preterition as an eternal act in the mind of God, especially within the limits of the Old Testament. But a moment's reflection will show that this applies equally much to the Old Testament doctrine of election. Both election and preterition are by preference viewed in the Old Testament as they emerge in the actual control of the issues of history. It is God acting in result of his eternal will, rather than willing in advance of his temporal act what this stage of revelation describes to us. Keeping this in mind, we perceive that preterition is as frequently and as emphatically spoken of as its counterpart, not only in national and collective relations, but also with reference to individuals, sometimes with so little attempt at guarding against possible misapprehensions that the appearance results as if the decree somehow were the efficient cause of unbelief instead of merely permitting and controlling it for its own holy ends as it really does. In the New Testament, while the historical mode of viewing the decree as passing over into realization is not abandoned, the eternal background of the same, as it exists above all time, an ideal world in God, is more clearly revealed.

In the third place, the Bible still more pointedly calls attention to the necessary place which preterition occupies in the general decree of God pertaining to salvation, when it defines the act of predestination with eternal life, as is one of its fundamental aspects an elective act by which certain persons are singled out from among a greater number of individuals. The specific sense of both the Hebrew and Greek terms rendered by "election"

results from the prominence they both give to the element of discrimination implied in the divine choice. While, therefore, predestination as the appointment to the goal of eternal salvation can be logically conceived without the correlate of preterition, it is different with the idea of election. This idea is of such a nature that it cannot even be completed in thought without positing at the same time the idea of preterition. For this reason it is an utterly futile endeavor to attempt to construe a formula which shall adequately reproduce the scriptural doctrine of election, and yet leave unexpressed the correlated doctrine of preterition. This becomes specially significant in view of the fact that the term "election" strongly preponderates over all others in the scriptural references to the decree of salvation. In a divine revelation where nothing is insignificant, there must be assumed to exist a special motive for the preference thus given to one among the many terms that stood at the Holy Spirit's disposal. In other words, if the Bible thinks it necessary to teach us not merely that Christians are predestined by free grace into eternal salvation, but also thinks it necessary persistently to remind us how this appointment of some into life took place from among a number of others who were sovereignly passed by, then this can only mean that in the view of God the principle of preterition is essential to the expression of the most important aspect of the decree of salvation.

Nor does the Bible leave us in doubt as to why such great practical importance for our instruction is attached by God to the discriminating element in predestination. The motive is none other than to impress most profoundly upon the mind of believers the conviction of the absolutely gracious character of their redemption. No stronger way of bringing this out is conceivable than by showing in actual experience that under entirely equal conditions, as viewed from the human standpoint, one man is saved, another is left unsaved in his sin. To use the classical statement of the Apostle Paul on this very same problem: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the elective purpose of God might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger." This is far from saying, that the motive here disclosed is the only one that determines God in the mysterious act of election. There may be many other motives, all equally wise and holy, entering into his choice and which it has not pleased him to reveal to our finite understanding. But this one motive he has made known to us, and thereby also indirectly taught us, that, whatever other reasons for his sovereign decree may exist, they can have nothing to do with anything meritorious possessed by one man above another. Thus the sole purport of the doctrine of preterition as presented to our faith in the Scriptures is the exaltation of the grace of God. Can a Church which professes pre-eminently to uphold the Gospel of free grace, refuse to echo this part of God's revelation in her Confession? And can it be safe for any Church to erase from her creed a mode of expressing the divine grace, which God himself has used to instruct us, on the plea that she deems its use unpopular and inexpedient? Shall man be wiser than God?

—Nothing brings more substantial joy than a day's work well and honorably and successfully done.

Current Themes.

By Rev. A. A. E. Taylor, D.D.

UP TO DATE.

We recently saw a sign swinging high across the pavement from a city store. It contained only the words "Up-to-date." That was evidently deemed sufficient to meet all requirements in every class of merchandise. The world seems to be stricken with the up-to-date fever, and its symptoms are very unfavorable to speedy recovery. We were rejoiced the other day to receive a visit from one of our oldest and best friends. He and I were born in the same town on different sides of a double house, eight days apart. Our parents were very intimate, and all our lives we have been closely attached. Of course, Dr. John being a week older, patronizes me, reminding me of my youth and inexperience. And in turn I warn him to be very careful where he steps, remembering his age and infirmity. I had to remind him the other day that we were not quite up to date in some of our old-fashioned notions. And he responded by saying that the giddy world seems to be leaving us somewhat behind. Well, it is getting to be a very rapid and swift-footed world. And in its insatiate furore for progress and speed, with reckless steps, it is trampling down many of the old things that not long ago seemed sacred to men. There is positively a craze for newness and modernity in all lines. There is an undisguised and haughty scorn for any old thing that fails to keep up with the procession. Last month's magazine or yesterday's daily is already a back number. Being behind the times seems to have acquired a moral quality and one who in any respect is not up to date feels a sort of guiltiness that makes him wilt in the presence of people in the pushing line of progress.

Of course, it is the case with the fashions. When we brought out our last year's straw hat that was in excellent condition and fitted by use to our head, the junior partner and her echo and ally, lifted their hands in holy horror, for the dear old thing was altogether out of style, and looked like I don't know what. To prevent family discord we are now wearing an uncomfortable and despised up-to-date tile.

People seem to be so much afraid of falling behind the rest of folks. This spirit is grown to be a moral distemper and is eating out the independence and manhood of the times. If we don't believe everything that others believe and in the precise phraseology that they use, then we are slow, old fogies, and have fallen out of the line of intellectual march to straggle behind. And the airs that these boasted and conceited up-to-date people put on is altogether intolerable. We meet a good many of these up-to-daters in science and other modern advanced lines of thought. And they look down upon every one who has not accepted their conclusions of advanced thought as ignorant, unprogressive and last century tortoises. There is where the modern tendency to liberalism acquires its seeming popularity. People want to seem to be up with the times and not to let anybody have an idea ahead of others. Even some religious papers, so-called, seem ready to sacrifice old theories and platforms before they have been proved wrong, because they think popular opinion is swinging in that direction. It is a good thing for the subscription list for a representative paper