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DOES OUR DISCIPLESHIP COST US ANYTHING?

While religion is not purchasable by self-denying service or sacrifice as a meritorious cause, sacrifice is inseparably connected with religion, as an essential condition. It has nearer place to the gospel than a prefix. Contact, however close, does not name it. It issues out of religion—is its product and fruitage. The very conditions of spiritual life, if they be truly met, will compel a daily crucifixion. To bring the sluggish soul to activity; to break the idolatrous spirit away from its idols; to quell and overmaster and put away the lasts of the natural heart that are so clamorous for indulgence; to wage warfare with all that is evil; to oppose the prevailing tendencies to sin in the individual life and in the life of the world; to stand as a witness for Jesus, a living epistle, that men may read every day with no danger of false guidance, bringing no reproach upon the dear Lord and no harm to his precious cause; to have the life of God in the soul a reality, a power, a vital force, antagonizing all worldliness and selfishness and earthliness, and pushing us out to all Christian activities; to do all Christ-like work in a Christ-like spirit and with Christ-like fidelity and constancy in this utterly Christ-like world; surely this is an impossibility without sacrifice. And there can be no real spiritual life where this is not sought to be done.

Self-denial is the essential law of the gospel. "Take up thy cross daily," is Christ's command to every believer. "Deny thyself" arches the very entrance gate to the narrow way of Life. It is written in letters of living light all along and on either side that narrow way, clear up to the gates of the new Jerusalem and city of God. Our Gospel, with all its freedom and with all its joy, promising rest to the weary and beauty for ashes and gladness for bitterness, is nevertheless a cross-signed, yoke-bearing, burden-imposing gospel. It is the gospel of the crucifixion. And the crucifixion is not only at Calvary's cross. It is in human hearts and lives—the crucifixion of sin and self—the crucifixion of pride and lust—the sacrificing to God at a cost. "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

It becomes us to inquire whether we have not measurably lost sight of this great gospel condition. Does our Christian discipleship cost us anything? Do we know anything of "daily" cross-bearing for our dear Lord's sake? What does the Church think about this? What do indulgence-loving, ease-seeking, world-conforming, pleasure-taking Christians think about it? Let us be specific, and not lose the force of the truth in generalities.

Apply this law of self-denial to Christian benevolence. By what rule do we commonly decide the measure of our liberality? How many are there in the Church, continuing to give up to the point of giving at a cost—until giving compels the denial of some cherished gratification? It may, indeed, pinch some souls to give at all: the least of their contributions to the Lord's treasury being doled out in beggarly pittance from plenary pockets with great reluctance. Here is self-denial, indeed, resulting from the violent wrench that conscience sometimes gives to covetousness; but it is hardly the cross-bearing enjoined of Jesus. And even where we see the "cheerful giver," it is common to find him going up the scale of Christian beneficence and adding to the sum of his contribution until he says, "If I give that, I shall feel it; but I will not offer what costs me nothing." Some of God's poor do it. Their untrumpeted mites, given of want, most sweetly exemplify this spirit of Gospel self-denial. But if the Church at large did it, what a grand impetus Christian evangelism would have in this country and the world!

Again; apply this law of self-denial to Christian work. There is such work—needed work—that waits to be done—that must be done, or men must die. Work with a cross in it. Work that shall sweat the brow, and tire the muscle, and go against natural inclination, and breast the current of easy desire and brave a shower of a rainy Sabbath, and confront with God's truth the impatient and the unsaved, and make our altars and our closets wrestling places and scenes of sore conflict, instead of places of lame and lazy and effortless petition. We can work when we have a natural taste for the work. But what if it be self-denying work, to do which will cost something, and jostle us out of our accustomed paths of self-indulgence, and send us to God for help? We can pray, when to pray is simply to go through

with the phraseology of prayer. That, is at no cost. But the men that have moved God, have been at some expense of time and effort and struggle and strong crying and tears. Is our praying after this sort?

Worldly work has self-denial enough; should it have so great a monopoly of it? Is not the Church of the living God, of all places, where it should be most manifest? And here, if we be truly possessed with the Spirit of the Master, ought we not to be led to cheerful sacrifices?

Religion is love. And God is love. And he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. And love's divinest office is to suffer. And the divinest expression of all this was when our suffering Saviour took up his cross, saying: "Lo, I come: I delight to do thy will, O my God." Can we stand blessed and folded about in that suffering love of His, and yet know nothing of self-denial for Him? Can we expect all the benefits of his cross, and yet carry no cross? Ah, we should be ashamed of forever seeking out smooth paths, and forever avoiding rough places in all that relates to work for God. Burdens should be uplifted under love's glad inspiration. Crosses should be upborne and carried, because somehow it was the way the Master trod. The spirit of self-denial should have its spring in the love of the soul for Jesus and in the hunger of the soul to be like Him. Standing beneath the cross and looking up into the face of the Man of Sorrows, it should be in our hearts to say, "All for Thee, O Lord! Oh my Jesus, all for Thee!" H. J.

APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION.

In reply to an article written by us on the above subject, and published in the AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN, December 17, 1868, we have received a letter from a Western brother, who signs himself W. M. S. This brother differs from us in three very important particulars. First, He is not a D. D., and is grieved to think we have such an appendage. Second, He is Pastor in Vergennes, Ill., and we in North Broad street, Philadelphia; and thirdly—He does not believe in the Apostolic Benediction, and we do.

As to the first two of those distinctions, they are irrelevant to the subject, and we therefore dismiss them, with this single remark that we care as little for titles and positions, probably, as our brother; and while he congratulates himself on his freedom from such burdens and responsibilities, he ought to treat compassionately those upon whom they have been thrust unsought. A D. D., or an LL. D., may at some time be imposed upon him, and then, unless he has the power or the courage of good Mr. Barnes, he may be forced to carry the tail, even if he does not wiggle it. Very likely he would wiggle it some.

But now to the main subject—the Benediction. Let us briefly consider these questions: What is the nature and design of the Benediction? What should be its form? Who may use it? How should it be given and received?

I. In considering its nature and design we must also inquire into its history. It was a common thing for the Patriarchs to pronounce a solemn blessing upon their children, especially when they were dying. Melchisedec pronounced a blessing upon Abraham. This he did in his official capacity. This blessing was regarded by Paul as important, and perhaps, we may infer from his words—Heb. 7: 7, "And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the greater"—that it was a customary thing for the Priest in that day to pronounce an official blessing.

In the Levitical times we find the High Priest Aaron, and his sons, were commanded to pronounce this blessing upon the people: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee! The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee! The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace!" Numbers 6: 24-26. And then, by way of explanation it is added, "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them." Just when this ceremony was performed we do not know, but we perceive it is like that pronounced by the Patriarchs and Melchisedec, a blessing and not a mere prayer. It is argued by some that there is in this blessing a recognition of the doctrine of the Trinity—that the three parts of this Levitical blessing may be considered as referring to the blessing of Jehovah the Father as the Great Protector, of Jehovah the Son as the author and source of mercy and love, of Jehovah the Spirit from whom emanates peace.

We next notice the direction given by Christ to his disciples when they entered a house—They were to say, "Peace be to this house"—And He himself when He appeared among the disciples after His resurrection said: "Peace be unto you."

Then come the Pauline benediction and salutations. The one in 2 Cor. 13: 14 is the fullest in form, and is usually called "The Apostolic Benediction," "The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all."

Carefully look at all these from Abraham to Paul, and you will notice these characteristics: They are not prayers, but blessings. The person speaking may include himself, as doubtless, Aaron did, when he pronounced the Benediction upon the congregation of Israel. But he stands in the place of God. He speaks as one having a holy authority and commission. Solemnly he puts the divine name upon those whom he addresses, and blesses them in the name of the Lord.

Now do you ask whence we derive our authority for closing our Sanctuary service with what is called the Benediction? We reply, we cannot tell. The Bible does not make it necessary. There is no positive law about this matter given upon the sacred page, by which we and the Church in all times are to be governed. Yet it is an old custom. For aught we know to the contrary it comes down to us from the Apostles. In many churches in the commencement of divine service there is a salutation given, as there is a blessing at the close. In some, the benediction is pronounced at the close of the order for public prayer. This is the case in the liturgies of the Greek, Roman and English Service. In our age it is regarded as the proper mode of dismissing a religious assembly, and hence, by all denominations of Christians it is so used, and, when a minister of Christ is present, he is usually invited to conclude a religious exercise and oftentimes one which is secular in its nature, with the Benediction.

II. What should be the form of the Benediction? Very many are presented in the Bible, to some of which we have alluded. If these are used, let them be quoted correctly. We do not like to have hymns and other human compositions mangled. How much worse is it to distort or endeavor to improve upon the word of God? The late Dr. Bethune, who was justly regarded by all who knew him, as a person of rare good taste, was always pleased when he heard the benediction pronounced correctly, and frequently gave utterance to his commendation.

But we do not consider it necessary to employ the language of Scripture. At our second service we often use this form: "The blessing of the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you! Amen!" But we do not say "may the blessing, &c.," or substitute "us" for "you," simply because we do not think that would be a benediction, but a prayer. Are we right or wrong? We stand open to conviction. Undoubtedly any brother may, if he choose, conclude the service of the Sanctuary, as we heard one lately do, with the formula "Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." We do not suppose in so doing he violated any ecclesiastical law. But was it the benediction which he pronounced, or simply a doxology?

III. Who may pronounce the Benediction? We think only the ordained minister, and in this we find many agree with us. Our form of government makes a distinction between the licentiate or candidate, and the bishop or minister. The former cannot administer the sacraments. He is only permitted to come before the people on trial, as a probationer. See chapter XIV. So in the Episcopal Church. The Deacon is not invested with full ministerial power. He cannot administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, although, as we think very inconsistently, he is permitted to administer the Sacrament of Baptism. And you will notice in the Book of Common Prayer, the morning and evening service, each, ends with the Apostolic Benediction in the form of a prayer, the word "us" being substituted for "you," because these prayers may be read by the Deacon:—whereas the Communion Service which can only be performed by a priest or one invested with full ministerial authority, concludes with a benediction proper, or a blessing pronounced upon the people.

Unquestionably any father may pronounce a blessing upon his child, any friend upon a friend. But in the sanctuary the minister is the one clothed with authority. This is evident from the language of our Saviour addressed to the early preachers. See John 20: 23. We differ from our Episcopal brethren who regard the pastor as a priest. We do not think, in the sacerdotal office, he is the successor of Aaron or Melchisedec. Christ now is the High Priest, and has made the great atonement, and as intercessors all Christians are denominated priests unto God. But we do think our Lord has appointed ministers in the New Testament Church, and that they have some special authority. There is a tendency now a days to break down all the old walls. May we not be too progressive in this

direction? While flying from one extreme, may we not plunge into the other? We believe in all Christians, working, praying and preaching. But we are not prepared to close up our theological seminaries, demolish our pulpits, and transform every Christian into a minister, or every ordained minister back again into a layman.

IV. How should the blessing be given and received? Unquestionably with great reverence and solemnity. The minister should feel he stands in the place of God, and deliberately and tenderly should pronounce the blessing, in whatever form he chooses to put it, upon the people. They should regard it as a most important part of the service. There should be no lifting of hats, and adjusting of coats, and impatient preparations made for leaving the house of God during this exercise. The assembly should bow their heads, and with holy awe, yet with holy joy, receive the benediction of the Triune God coming to them from His servant. Well is it said: "As much as the ministrations of righteousness exceeds in glory the ministrations of condemnation, in such proportion must the benedictions of the Christian be more blessed, and more effectual than those of the Jewish minister. Only let it not be forgotten that neither has the smallest absolute and independent authority; neither is more than a minister. The office of the ministry, whether under the old or new dispensation is only a channel and vehicle, by no means a source of Grace. It is not really the minister in either case who blesses, but Christ who thus uses His ministry." (Gouldburn's Office of The Holy Communion)

We have discussed this subject very imperfectly, because we wished to do it briefly. If any wish to see it treated in a more exhaustive manner we refer them to an exceedingly able and interesting article on the subject by the late Rev. Dr. Yeomans in the Princeton Review for April, 1861. P. S.

THE REUNION MOVEMENT.

The labors of the Reunion Committee, which met in New York City, two weeks ago, have been described, by several of our cotemporaries, as limited to a recommendation to our Assembly to abandon the Smith and Gurley clauses of the First Article, and the Tenth Article entire. This is not at all correct. The Committee never could have been brought to agree upon this bare recommendation. They did, indeed, propose this concession to the General Assembly, but at the same time, to couple with it an explicit declaration of their adherence to the principles of Christian Liberty asserted in the Gurley clause of the First Article, and characteristic of our Branch of the Presbyterian Church. This action, which is being matured by a Subcommittee, we are glad to learn, will be printed and sent to every one of the Presbyteries of both Branches, in time for their action at the Spring meetings.

We are sure that more than one member of the Reunion Committee have been surprised at the inadequate account of the results of the Committee's labors, thus simultaneously and confidently set forth in different parts of the Church. —With the generosity and placability which has been characteristic of our Branch, ever since the division, our Presbyteries in New York, in the very regions, and composing the very Synods which were so deeply wronged by the Excision of 1837, are voting for immediate reunion on such terms as the other branch feel disposed to offer. They have not only forgiven the Excising Acts, but they lay out of the account the recent successive refusals of a majority of the O. S. Presbyteries to recognize the distinctive principles of our branch in the basis of reunion. These Presbyteries, beginning with Buffalo, will be found, we are persuaded, not a whit less New School than they used to be; not a whit more afraid of measures adapted to promote the rapid spread of the Gospel; not a whit more disposed to abandon the American Board as an honored agency in the Foreign Missionary work; they will send not one more of their sons to Princeton or Alleghany Seminary than before. Their very New-Schoolism is illustrated in the careless, overflowing generosity, with which they accept offers made under circumstances which, in the judgment of others, call for prudence and reserve. To such minds, it is far easier to be generous than to be prudent; to follow a noble impulse at once, and leave to posterity the, perhaps, only possible complications that may result. Besides, our New School brethren of the Empire State, being vastly more numerous than the Old School, are in a position of advantage, especially promotive of generosity in a New School mind. There are neighborhoods much more favorable to the growth of caution; where the inestimable value of our liberal principles is more keenly felt, and

their peril, in an unadvised Reunion, better understood; and we cannot but believe that the final decision of our branch on the whole subject will be mingled of generosity and good judgment, of the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove. A right Union, a real Union, a permanent Union, because a comprehensive Union, in which each party will have no scruple or reserve in recognizing and honoring the peculiarities of the other: this, and this alone, is what we should insist upon, as safe, honorable, and promotive of the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

THE THEATRES AND THE PRESS.

The great prominence given by almost the entire daily and secular press, to theatrical amusements, seems to us utterly out of proportion to the tastes and wishes of the relative classes of their readers. Without doubt, the support of these papers comes from the substantial, common-sense, Christian people of the community; those in Philadelphia, for instance, who through the three or four hundred Evangelical churches, rather than the frequenters of the half-a-dozen places of theatrical entertainment in our city. The patronage of this motley, idle, dissipated, reckless crowd would scarcely be missed from the subscription lists or the advertising columns of our recognized secular press, while the quarter or third of a million of theatre-going people, are exactly the thrifty, intelligent class, without which newspapers could not exist. And yet there is scarcely a secular paper of standing, without its special department of dramatic criticism, so managed as to put theatrical performances, from year to year, more prominently before the public than perhaps any other matter that appears in its columns. Every phase of theatrical management, every new actor, every change and novelty are followed up, chronicled, and analyzed with a zest equal to that shown in the fortunes of a political struggle. The amount of puffing which the trashy, sensational, and indecent performances that now occupy the stage, receive from the press, is almost incredible; not to speak of occasional ill-humored thrusts, or longer diatribes against the clergy and religious people, for not agreeing with the critics as to the good or evil tendency of the whole thing. Thus, an utterly fictitious respectability is given to the theatre, and the sentiment of the community is wholly misrepresented.

Is it not high time for a change? How can our merchants quietly see such glowing allurements to dissipation fall every day under the eye of clerks, upon whose integrity depends half of their business? Why should Christian people consent to be so grossly misrepresented, and to have the youth of their families brought into peril by those agencies, which only exist by their patronage? Why not make their sentiments so emphatic, that such of the daily press as choose to be the organs of theatre managers, may be limited to the patronage of those managers and their friends; while the others may find some suitable corner for the mention of the Black Crook, the White Fawn, and all that sort of thing, among police reports, criminal trials, or under the general heading of Vice and Immorality? And we verily believe that, in so doing, they would come a great way nearer representing the actual state of public opinion than they now do.

—Naturally enough, His Holiness Pius IX takes little pleasure in the revolution in Spain. What a pity that one claiming to be the Father of the faithful should not be content to express his feelings and views without coloring them with the grossest misrepresentation of the facts! According to the Pall Mall Gazette, the Pope

"Held an Allocution on the Spanish Revolution, Dec. 22, at which he said that this event arose from the turbulence of a minority, who, led on by conspirators, surprised and cowed the great body of the Spanish nation and drove their legitimate sovereign from the throne. He spoke in high terms of the moderation and love of order which characterized the Spanish people, and denounced the revolutionists as alike abettors of anarchy and enemies of religion. He bitterly complained of the insults heaped on priests and venerable bishops, and the persecution of the religious orders, who were subjected to the most cruel actions; and he concluded by exhorting the Sacred College to raise their prayers to Heaven to stop this torrent of evil, and restore Spain her sovereign and her religion."

Spain is indeed likely to have more monarchs, but the Pope's supremacy went out with that of the corrupt woman whom he chooses to name so respectfully.