

INTERNALISM versus UNITY

(By Daniel Sommer)

The religious reformers of the sixteenth century and onward to the nineteenth protested against the pretended authority of Roman Catholicism, but did not fully accept authority of Christ. They denied the assumed infallibility of Rome's pretensions, but did not fully accept the infallibility of the Bible. But in order to have the full assurance which would make them happy, they appealed to their own conscience, and to thus their own feelings. A good conscience, as indicated by comfortable feelings, they regarded as good evidence of their acceptance with God— whether they believed they were justified "by faith only" or "by grace only", and whether they believed in "episcopal" or "Presbyterian" church government. One of their number (James Arminius) was accustomed to say—"A good conscience is a paradise!" Their chief purpose in the sixteenth century seems to have been to denounce "Rome's errors" (as they regarded them) and formulate doctrines that could be "proved by the Bible, and thus would be acceptable to God, and for the salvation of mankind.

The thought never seemed to have occurred to any one of those reformers that the Bible was given for doctrine, as the apostle Paul declared in 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, and not as "proof" of doctrines humanly arranged and formulated. Several reformers even declared that the Bible was the "infallible, standard" by which to measure their doctrines; yet the thought is not mentioned that the Bible was intended to be the doctrine or teaching for them to accept without any doctrine humanly formulated or statements, of doctrine made. But having decided to adopt humanly arranged creeds as "standards" of measuring faith and practice, those creeds became the doctrines or teachings of the churches that adopted them. And however, different those doctrines were, yet the emotions or internal feelings, or the conscience, became the final standard of appeal in regard to supposed acceptance with God. And the same is yet true with all adherents to creeds formulated in the sixteenth century. Framers of those creeds prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance, then framed them; and because they "felt good" over what they had done, they concluded their work was acceptable to God, however different their creeds were from each other!

In the seventeenth century impetus was given to the supposition concerning the Holy Spirit's "direct operation" on minds and hearts of mankind as the interpreter of Scripture. The history of George Fox (author of the Friends movement) informs us of this. Then in the eighteenth century the Wesleys assisted in making "direct operation" of the Spirit of God on the spirit of mankind a common doctrine. It was convenient doctrine, which gave each believer the privilege of saying "I feel" thus-and-so, and "I know what I feel." Presbyterians, Baptists, United Brethren. New-lights and several other religious bodies adopted the same "standard" of measuring. In proportion as they did so the exact declarations of the word of God became what mathematicians would call "a variable quantity". Those declarations were a subject to " modifications". Yes, and the conclusion of Episcopalians about "apostolic

succession", an the advocacy of immersion as the only scriptural baptism (as contended for by the Baptists)—even these "stiff and staid" conclusions were subject to "modifications" when measured by the internal feelings, the emotions, the conscience. "Whoever would say "I feel that I am a Christian", or "My heart tells me I am child of God"—that one would be acknowledged "safe for heaven" regardless of "Episcopal succession" or "Baptistic Immersion". And same is true of every one who says "I feel that I love God", or "feel that I love my Savior", regardless of church membership; "I feel that I have saving faith", or "feel that I have saving grace, and am one of God's elect from before the foundation of the world." All these confessions are sanctified and accepted because of Internalism" as a recognized standard of measuring acceptance with God.

And this internal standard of measuring makes one brotherhood of all Protestant churches except a very few. Those included in that "few" contend the faith in God and Christ is determined by humble obedience to what God requires of them. And they refer to Hebrews 11th chapter with James 2nd chapter and much more of the Sacred Text, as evidence in that direction. They refer, for instance, to Num. 20:7-1 and show that as soon as Moses and Aaron disobeyed God by doing something in their own name, and thus speaking "unadvisedly" (Psa. 106:32, 33)—as soon as they did that they were charged with "unbelief!" Yes, and they refer also to Heb. 4:17-19, where we learn that unbelief was charged against all Israelites who disobeyed God in the wilderness when Moses was their leader from Egypt to Canaan. By such references an argument is made that belief in God, and obeying his commands strictly, are the same in the conclusions. And that argument is overwhelming to all who consider it seriously. Then those people or religious bodies make the same kind of argument in regard to love, and declare that love for God and Christ is determined by obeying the divine commands. Their Scripture "references in making that arguments are such as John 14:15, 21-24, where we find these declarations: "If ye love me, keep my commandments. . . . He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me... If a man love me, he will keep my words....He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings." They refer also to 1 John 5:3—"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." Then, besides all this, those churches now under consideration contend that acceptable calling of God and Christ is determined by obedience; and refer to Matt, 7:21-23, where the Savior said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom, of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." They refer also to Luke 6:46, where we learn the Savior said, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" In view of all this, what becomes of the "internal standard" of measuring man's acceptance with God and Christ!

But those to whom reference is here made as contentious for obedience to divine commands in their most evident meaning,—those who thus contend refer to Prov. 28:26—"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered." And they even refer to Jer. 17:9, where we find: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it? They refer also to Matt, 15:19, where this saying of our Savior is recorded: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders,

adulteries, fornications, thefts, blasphemies." Then they say such an "internal standard" is not a safe "measuring rule" in regard to our acceptance with God. They generally refer to Acts 23:1, where the apostle Paul declared he had lived in "all good conscience" while he was a blasphemer, persecutor and injurious (as he wrote with reference to himself in 1 Tim. 1:13).

Now, in view of such scriptures and such reasoning concerning them, what shall those of us say who measure by our emotions, or internal feelings, or consciences? and, as a result, conclude that every scripture concerning church polity and discipline, church names and organizations, baptism and the Lord's Supper—all those scriptures may be treated with indifference and regarded as non-essential to salvation! Is the book of Acts of no importance in teaching us how to become Christians? Is the order of obedience therein indicated a "dead letter" for us? Can we have "the faith that saves" if we have not the faith that obeys, or that impels obedience? Can we have "the love that saves" if we have not the love that obeys, or that impels obedience to all that is divinely required? Can we make the confession of faith that is acceptable to God, if we regard the divine will as "expressed in the gospel as of no importance?"

A miracle of humility needs to be wrought! And those of us who have regarded the Greek word "baptidzo" as susceptible of being reduced to "rantidzo"—we may work that miracle, or show it to our fellow mortals, by humbling ourselves to such degree that we will wish to be "buried" with our Lord in baptism—because we have more confidence in the word of God than we have in our own feelings or emotions, or; conscience! Yes, and we may show that "miracle of humility" by rejecting all humanly given names, and then adopt the name Christian—after we will have "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine" delivered to us in the gospel, and of which we read specially in the book of Acts and the sixth chapter of Romans. Assuming the name "Christians" before we have obeyed the same "form "of doctrine" which those obeyed who became Christians in the period mentioned in the book of Acts, is not appropriate, to say the least. It would be very much like a foreigner in this country assuming the name "American citizen" before he has obeyed the form of doctrine the States government has prescribed in order, to citizens here of those born in some other country.

Then a "miracle of humility" is required in all those who have adopted this doctrine for converting sinners to Christ: "Repent and pray till you feel sins are forgiven, and then be baptized when you wish to join some church not mentioned in the Bible."

The "miracle" will consist of humbly deciding to reject that doctrine and adopt this instead: Believe, repent, confess and be baptized by authority of Christ, into the name of the Godhead, as all teaching in New Testament on the subject clearly indicates. Those who doubt this should read the Savior's last commission to his apostles, recorded in the last chapter of Matthew, also of Mark; and then read the book of Acts. By thus reading with humility and reverence, the fact will become evident that conversion to Christ according to the New Testament is very different from what has been adopted in modern times by many

religious people.

When, the will of a penitent sinner is" fully surrendered to Christ, then joyous feelings are a natural result. This may be illustrated by reference to the surrender made to each other by persons intending to enter the marriage relation. As soon as the surrender is made then emotions are stirred that are new and joyous! But these emotions should not be regarded as evidence the marriage has been already consummated. And those who think thus are in danger of demoralizing themselves and becoming a reproach in the community.

And what of those preachers who declare happy feelings in those who believe in Christ and have surrendered their wills to Him are proof they are already "married" to Him and should be regarded as Christians? In Rom. 7:4 Christians are declared to have been "married" to Christ. But when was that marriage, consummated? "Was it when they had joyous feelings because they surrendered their will to Christ? Or was it when they afterward obeyed, from the heart that form of doctrine referred to in Rom, 6:17, 18? (Reader, "Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." See 2 Tim. 2:7.)

What is wrong with these statements in behalf of unity?

1. We may all unite on "disciple" as a scriptural name for every learner of Christ in the entire domain of "Christendom."

2. We may all unite on "Christian", as a scriptural name for all disciples who have obeyed Christ as the book of Acts informs us learners of Christ obeyed him in the first century of the gospel age.

3. We may all unite on "church of Christ" as a scriptural, name, for every church made up of those who have obeyed the gospel offered in the book of Acts.

4. We may all unite on the first day of the week as the scriptural day for the communion commonly called "the Lord's supper".

5. "We may all unite on immersion as a scriptural method of obeying the command to be baptized.

6. "We may all unite in declaring we should have more confidence in the word of God as found in Rom.6:17, 18 than in our own feelings, or our conscience as evidence of pardon.

7. We may ,all unite in the decision that "churches of Christ" mentioned in the New Testament were congregational in polity or local government and that such polity is scriptural.

8. We may all unite in the conclusion that the highest office one can have in the church Christ died to establish is—to be the humblest and most efficient servant of the greatest numbers of mankind. See Matt. 20:25-28.

9. We may all unite in regard to singing acceptably to God without use of musical

instruments as accompaniment in our song service.

10. We may all unite that elderly men are generally more scriptural in the pastorate of a church than are young men, who are without experience.

11. We may all unite that elders and deacons, who have scriptural qualifications for their official position, are the scriptural officers for a local congregation.

12. We may all unite that in Acts.6th and 15th chapters we find scriptural example for managing, the most important affairs of a congregation.

13. We may all admit that in Acts 11th chapter we have scriptural example of the trial of a disciple accused of a wrong.

14. We may all admit the local church is the only missionary society we read of in the New Testament; likewise that the local church is the only benevolent, financial, endeavor or educational society "we read of in the New Testament.

With these fourteen admissions made wholeheartedly, and thus without mental reservation, then the Protestant denominations will be so nearly perfectly united that nothing will remain to disturb us.

But a miracle of humility will be needed to accomplish those admissions! Yet when that miracle has been performed then we may sing aright—

"Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love—

The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above."

But whether this miracle of humility will ever be wrought, or whether evil men and seducers among preachers and others will "wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived", as Paul declared in 2 Tim. 3:13, I know not. Yet my purpose is to remain true to the Savior's prayer for unity and contend and pray for it daily till my life's work will end. And I shall wish that I may be clear enough in thought when the latest hour of my earth-life will be due, that I may offer "a prayer for "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" to prevail among all believers in Christ, and especially in "the disciple brotherhood."

ADDED REMARKS.—When I thought my work in writing a record of my life was about ended I remembered a pamphlet was thrust before me, several years ago, advocating but "one cup" in Communion, regardless of the number of communicants. It was written with pretense of scholarship, and stressed the container of the fruit of the vine rather than the fruit itself. This I regarded as an absurdity, and the, reverse of those who contend for handing around the bread of the Communion in the hand rather than in a plate—"because no plate is mentioned in the Divine! record"!

But the mentioned pamphlet ended with the statement that we could be united on "one cup"but could not be united on two, or more than two: To this I replied that the apostle Paul,

in Ephesians 4th chapter mentioned sev.en.units in his exhortation for unity, but the author of the pamphlet decided another unit should be introduced. Paul' mentioned "one body", "one Spirit," "one hope" "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God." But this pamphlet decided an eighth unit should be mentioned, and that should be "one cup" in Communion—and "one only cup!"

Then I began to think of those disciples who had urged "one class, and one class only" in teaching children, and had caused disturbance and even, division by contending that children should, not be divided into two or more classes in a meeting house in order to be taught. Next I thought of my debate in 1927 with J. N. Cowan, in Sullivan, Ind. He came up from the Southland to disturb as many disciples as possible about the "one-class question", "the war question," "the re-baptism question," and as I now recollect "the woman silence question." And though that debate continued about five days yet it was nearly forgotten by me. And though I was nearly seventy-seven years old when I engaged in that debate, yet I am not ashamed, of any of it except of parts of my opponent's behavior. He was, however, a fair representative of that defection from "the simplicity that is in Christ, which has developed in the Southland specially, and found lodgment in a few communities in the Northland. But it is decreasing even as several other extreme and technical notions are becoming numbered with the past.

But later still a defection has been commenced by reason of a false standard of "loyalty" having been erected by certain disciples, and by a demand that a certain religious, journal shall be more intense and exacting in regard to discipline than any congregation of disciples has thus far ventured to be. As a result this thought has occurred. to me:—Many professed Christians, beginning with the church in Corinth in ancient Greece, have acted as if the "Savior prayed that all who would believe in Him should be divided and subdivided into as many contending factions and parties as possible!

This thought has "recurred" to me because I first thought of it and expressed it nearly a half-century ago. And this means, if the Savior had prayed for his disciples to be divided into as many parties as possible, they could not have done much worse than they have done in working divisions and thereby introducing strife, contentions and carping criticisms. And whether such behavior on the part of professed believers in Christ has resulted from unavoidable ignorance, willful ignorance; perverseness, haste, impulsiveness or conceit—or all of these combined—I am not able to decide with safety to myself, for I might "make a mistake,. But my consolation is—"The Judge of all the earth will do right"; and He knows who would die for their Savior's sake.