

PACIFIC CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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Will Subscribers please notice the date following their names on the paper? It tells the time when your subscription expires; thus, if the date reads 1881, your subscription will expire Jan. 1, 1881. If the date after your name is a time past, you are in arrears. Please remit a little before your time is out, if possible.

Bro. J. B. Smith will hold a meeting at the Whittaker's school house, on the fifth Lord's day in this month, at the usual hour.

It is with sadness that we learn of the death of Bro. G. W. Springer, of Amity, last Saturday. Bro. S. died after a short but severe illness, and is mourned as one who dies with his armor on, in the pride of his strength and amid the heat of the battle. An obituary from some of his near friends will, we hope, be furnished us next week.

Why Jesus Spoke in Parables.

"All these things Jesus spake unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them." Matt. xiii. 34.

The universe in its amplitude existed first potentially in the mind of its author, and expressed, it became the manifestation of his will. It contains, therefore, the universal language, and the basis of all other languages.

It is probable that man, before he sinned, understood this universal expression of the divine will perfectly, and communed with his Creator through the sensible manifestations of his being. But the mind polluted by sin and perverted through ignorance ceased to comprehend the knowledge of Him through the things which do appear. They lost the power to see beyond the material, sensible and formal part of nature, or to realize that these were the mere formula in which "spirit and life" were embodied. Hence the necessity of an oral revelation making known "spirit and life."

But an oral revelation must draw all its terms and forms of expression from nature; for there is really no other language. Every word, however abstract, has its root in nature. It must rest upon some sensible form from which the mind can rise to the informal and real. Take as an example the word spirit, which has its origin in the mind, from a root whose primary meaning is to blow. And yet the mind clambers up through these expressions in Hebrew and Greek, denoting sensible objects, to the highest possible abstraction found in the conception of immateriality found in mind and spirit. And every attribute, function and power of mind is represented by some term borrowed from nature. Sweet, bitter or sour temper; high or low spirits; dark or clear understanding; bright or cloudy intellect; a distant relative a near friend; a knotty subject, are familiar expressions; yet these adjectives all belong to material objects. We use them because there is no other way to reach the qualities of the immaterial except through terms expressing parallel qualities in the material. The language of nature, which is the language of God, never can change, it is divine and immutable.

The vocal forms of human speech are arbitrary, and must be learned; but the ideas which they embody are the same to Him who comprehends all languages. When we learn these conventional vocabularies we do not understand them alike; hence arise all our honest differences. If we could have a pure speech, we should

all "see eye to eye" and speak the same things.

The nearest approximation to this perfect language of nature is found in parables. These are better suited to our weak minds, than the divine speech which arises above our feeble powers.

It was the effort of infinite love and mercy reaching down to our low estate to bring us up to some conception of our lost condition, and a Father's love and purpose to redeem us from ignorance and the power of sin and dominion of death. These parables speak the same language, and teach the same lessons to all people in all ages. They are paraphrases of that higher and purer concentration of thought which might, to one of those angelic beings who "excel in strength," be apprehended as a beam of light in a single and simple formula. But in the murk and mist of our gloomy abode on earth, the thought must be diluted and prepared for our feeble powers.

"We have, then, precept upon precept; line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that we might be brought to know the 'peace of God which passeth all understanding.'"

The Approaching Session.

The 20th of September will soon be here; and with it, we hope, a large class of students to enter Christian College. Protracted and grievous sickness has kept us at home, at a time when we desired to be in the field cultivating an intense interest in education, and presenting the claims and peculiarities of Monmouth as a safe place for youth, and Christian College as the institution where Bible-training purifies the heart as literary and scientific instruction enlightens and strengthens the mind.

We will be fully prepared with a competent corps of teachers to meet all the demands of the session.

We wish to commence the first term with a "boom" for study, and keep it up through the session.

Willing students, ambitious for the highest honors which merit can claim or energy secure, will find with us the facilities, aid and encouragement necessary to complete success.

"Educated mind governs the world." If we would have our sons and daughters bear an honorable part in that government, we must educate them. It is better to cultivate the mind, purify the heart and prepare them for usefulness and true happiness than neglect these and leave them millions.

Return to Primitive Christianity.

DISCUSSION OF LEADING PRINCIPLES.

[Selected.]
GOD.

I. "I AM THAT I AM." It is from his word and his works we learn the being and perfections of God. As we form a character of man from what he says and what he does, so learn we the Divine character. "The heavens declare his glory, and the firmament sheweth forth his handiwork: day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." Creation reveals the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God—Providence proclaims also his justice, truth, and holiness. Redemption develops his mercy, condescension, and love; and all these are again characterized by infinity, eternity, immutability. Nature, then, attests and displays the knowledge, wisdom, power, and goodness of God. The law and the providence of God especially declare his justice, truth, and holiness; while the gospel unfolds his mercy, condescension, and love: and all these proclaim that God is infinite, eternal, and immutable. God appears before the universe of intelligences in the threefold attitude of Creator, Lawgiver, and Redeemer; and, although each of these involves and reveals many of his excellencies, still in each department three are most conspicuous.

As Creator, wisdom, power, and goodness; as Lawgiver, justice, truth, and holiness; as Redeemer, mercy condescension, and love. In each and all of which departments he is infinite, immutable, and eternal.

II. But the Scriptures speak of his divinity, or godhead, as well as of the unity, spirituality, and eternity of his being. We have not, indeed, much said upon this incomprehensible theme, for who by searching can find out God, or know the Almighty to perfection? "The knowledge of him is high as heaven: what canst thou do? Deeper than hell: what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

III. Paul and Peter indeed speak of the divine nature in the abstract, or of the divinity of godhead. These are the most abstract terms found in the Bible. Eternity and divinity are, however, equally abstract and almost equally rare in Holy Writ. Still they are necessarily found in the divine volume; because we must abstract nature from person before we can understand the remedial system. For the divine nature may be communicated or imparted in some sense; and, indeed, while it is essentially and necessarily singular, it is certainly plural in its personal manifestations; hence we have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit equally divine, though personally distinct from each other. We have, in fact, but one God, one Lord, one Holy Spirit; yet these are equally possessed of one and the same divine nature.

IV. Some conceive of God as a mathematical unit; and as a thing cannot be both mathematically singular and plural—one and three, at the same time and in the same sense, they deny the true and proper divinity of the Son of God and of the Spirit of God. But it would seem to us that they reason not in harmony with the sacred style of inspiration. But why should we imagine that there cannot be a plurality of personal manifestations in the divine nature any more than in the angelic or human, especially as man was created in the image of God?

V. The relations in human plurality are indeed limited to three: for while all the human nature was at one time originally and wholly in the person of Adam, it was afterwards found equally in the person of Eve; and again in the person of the first-born. Now, as to its derivation and mode of existence, it was diverse in the three. In Adam it was underived as respected human nature, in Eve it was derived from Adam, and in Cain it was again derived from Adam and Eve. Here the matter ends; for while Eve proceeded from Adam and Eve in another, all the residue of human nature is participated without any new relation or mode of impartation. While, then, our nature is plural as to its participation, it is limited to three relations or modes of existence. Now, as man was made in the image of God, we must conceive of him as having plurality, relation, and society in himself—though far be it from us to suppose that the divine nature either is or can be fairly or fully exhibited by any resemblance or illustration drawn from angel or from man, or from any created thing. Still there is a resemblance between God and the sun that shines upon us—between God and an angel—between God and man; even in the mode of his existence, and in the varieties of relation and personal manifestation, there is so much resemblance as to, peremptorily forbid all dogmatism as to what is, or is not, compatible with the unity, spirituality, and immutability of God. But of this more fully and intelligibly when we shall have examined the record concerning the WORD and the SPIRIT OF GOD.

[Selected.]

DISTINCTION BETWEEN FAITH AND OPINION

This distinction is of the utmost importance, and lies at the very threshold of religious reformation and Christian union. Without a proper recognition

of the difference between FAITH and OPINION it is impossible to make any progress in a just knowledge of divine things, or to obtain any clew by which the mind can be extricated from the perplexed labyrinth of sectarianism. Notwithstanding, however, that it is so important to distinguish between these things which are so radically different from each other, they are everywhere confounded; the fallible deductions of human reason are continually mistaken for the unerring dictates of inspiration, and human authority is blended with that which is divine. Human opinions, indeed, are the plastic cement in which partyism has imbedded the more solid yet disconnected scriptural materials of its partition walls. Or, to employ another figure, a theory, consisting of any number of favorite opinions, smoothly intertwined, forms the thread upon which various Scripture doctrines and texts are strung and curiously interwoven, so as to assume a form and meaning wholly artificial and unauthorized.

When men thus fail to make any distinction between the express revelations of God and the opinions which men have superadded, and when they have already committed the great error of adopting indiscriminately, in the religious system of a party, and incongruous mixture of opinions with the things of faith, the mistiness and obscurity which surround the former overspread by degrees the latter also. Hence it has come to pass that matters of belief and mere speculation upon religious subjects are usually classed together as "religious opinions;" and when we speak of a man's religious opinions, we are constantly understood to mean, or, at least, to conclude, his belief. Hence, too, the divine communications themselves have lost much of the authority and respect which are justly due to them, by being thus reduced to a level with human opinions, and by the implication that they are so limited in their range of subjects, and so deficient in clearness, as to require additions and explanations from uninspired and fallible men, in order to render them intelligible and complete. The question, accordingly, is no longer, "What say the Scriptures?" "How readest thou?" "What hath the Lord spoken?" but, What do the Scriptures mean? What thinkest thou? What do the standards of my church or the leaders of my party say?

In opposition to views and practices so erroneous, we urge—

1. That the Scriptures mean precisely what they say, when construed in conformity with the established laws of language.

2. That the Bible contains the only divine revelations to which man has access; and that these revelations are perfectly suited, by their divine Author, to the circumstances and capacity of man to whom they are addressed.

3. The true religious faith can be founded upon this DIVINE TESTIMONY alone.

4. That opinions are mere inferences of human reason from insufficient and uncertain premises, or conjectures in regard to matters not revealed, and that they are not entitled to the slightest authority in religion, by whomsoever they may be propounded.

The measure of faith is, then, precisely the amount of Scripture testimony, neither more nor less. What this distinctly reveals, is to be implicitly believed. Where this is obscure or silent, reason must not attempt to elaborate theories or supply conclusions, and impose them upon the conscience as of divine authority. By the practical recognition of this principle, the theological systems and theories which have distracted religious society, and at once deprived of all their fancied importance, and consequently, of all their power to injure. Those remote speculations; those metaphysical subtleties; those untaught questions which have occupied the minds of the religious public, to the exclusion of the all-important, yet

simple truths of the Gospel, are at once dismissed as the futile reveries of uninspired and fallible mortals. When these are thus dismissed, THE HUMAN MIND IS LEFT ALONE WITH THE WORD OF GOD. It is brought into direct contact with the divine law and testimony, from which alone the light of spiritual truth can emanate, and this light is no longer obscured by the mists of human opinionism and speculation.

If this distinction were duly appreciated by the Protestant world, there would be a speedy end of those controversies by which it has been so long disturbed. For it is undeniable, that there is an almost universal agreement among the various evangelical denominations, in regard to the great revealed truths of Christianity; and that they are separated, alienated and belligerent, for the sake of certain favorite opinions, which have been promulgated by their founders. Each one admits that there exists this common Christianity, apart from denominational peculiarities, and that salvation is possible in any of these parties; yet each continues to urge its distinctive tenets, and maintain its peculiar

opinions, as though the salvation of the world depended upon these alone. Human opinions and speculations, then, have manifestly too much authority with the religious public, and are too highly honored in being made the great objects for which each party lives and labors. If, then, they were clearly distinguished from the revealed truths, upon which, like parasites, many of them have grown; if they were fairly separated from all connection with the divine testimony, from which they derive a stolen nourishment and a borrowed vigor, they would appear at once in their true character; as matters wholly foreign and insignificant, and would be allowed to droop and perish with all the bitter fruits they have so profusely borne.

It is preposterous to expect that men will ever agree in their religious opinions. It is neither necessary nor desirable that they should do so. It is no where commanded in the Scriptures that men should be of one opinion. It is there declared that there is "ONE FAITH," but is no where said that there is one opinion. On the contrary, differences of opinion are distinctly recognized, and Christians are expressly commanded to receive one another without regard to them. (Rom. xiv. 1). As well might we expect to conform the features of the human face to a single standard, as to secure a perfect agreement of men's minds. Hence there can be no peace, unless there be liberty of opinion.

Each individual must have a perfect right to entertain what opinion he pleases, but he must not attempt to enforce them upon others, or make them a term of communion or religious fellowship. They can do no harm, so long as they are private property, and are regarded in their true light, as human opinions POSSESSED OF NO DIVINE AUTHORITY OR INFALLIBILITY. It is quite otherwise, however, when leading and ambitious spirits take them for the warp and the Scriptures for the woof from which they weave the web of partyism. The flimsy and ill-assorted fabric may please the taste of the few, while it will be despised and derided by those who manufacture an article no better from similar incongruous materials, and thus a contention is perpetuated, with which human selfishness and pride have much more concern than either piety or humanity.

It is, accordingly, one of the primary objects of the present Reformation to put an end to all such controversies, by reducing human opinions to their proper level, and elevating the word of God, as the only true standard of religious faith. Hence it was, in the very beginning, resolved to "reduce to practice the simple original form of Christianity, expressly exhibited upon the sacred page, without attempting