

OUR DOCTRINES

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Our doctrines

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OUR DOCTRINES.

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE POSITION OF THE CUMBER-
LAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ON THE PRINCIPAL
DOCTRINES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

✓
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OUR DOCTRINES.

INTRODUCTORY WORD.

The General Assembly requested "The Cumberland Presbyterian" to publish a series of articles setting forth our doctrines, with comparative allusions here and there to the corresponding doctrines of other Christian denominations. This brief statement is the only apology that need be made for this and the few other articles which shall follow on the same general subject. It is obviously an easier matter for any writer or speaker to tell what he himself believes, or what his church believes, than it is to make known what other people believe. Being aware of this, I shall be as careful as possible to represent the beliefs of my ecclesiastical neighbors justly, in so far as I may represent them at all, and

in quoting whatever I may have to say about them I shall use only the official creeds or the writings of their authorized teachers. We should be generous enough to suppose that the Methodist Church, for example, would not be willing to have itself valued in the coin of any Methodist writer who might happen to come along; for every body knows, perhaps, that the country is rich not only in political cartoonists, but also in theological and ecclesiastical ones. It ought not to be so, but it is. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church has always been a good illustration of the generosity of which I speak. It is not famous as a controversialist in its relations with other churches; and in its methods of increasing its membership, it has always been very fair-minded and clean. This fact has never been formulated and put into its creed as an article of faith, so to speak, but I do think, nevertheless, that it ought to be regarded as something very much in its favor. Apart from its children, who may, in a sense, be said to be in it by birth, the great majority of its members, during the fourscore years or more of its history, have been brought into it from the world. It has most probably, in the aggre-

gate, given many more of its converts to other denominations than it has retained for its own edification. It has, to its disadvantage numerically, always tried hard to save sinners, even when it knew that those sinners, if saved, would not become its members. Having given the reader this little glimpse of what may be called our "genius," I hasten to the doctrines.

Is it not strange that intelligent people should make such a broad and radical distinction, as some do, between "doctrine" and "life?" How can the disposition, which every now and then gains considerable currency to utterly depreciate doctrinal statements on the part of the churches, be regarded otherwise than as due to thoughtlessness?—to say the least of it. Is it really true that it makes no difference what a church, or an individual man, believes? We might as well say that a tree can grow without having any soil out of which to grow. It doubtless is true that character lies, to a great extent, at least, in the state of the will, rather than in the state of the intelligence, but it is also true that the state of the latter has much to do in determining the state of the former. The fact is if a man does not live accord-

ing to his beliefs, he is not living according to his principles—whether good or bad—and hence he is so far a false man.

Whether presented in the creeds of the churches, or in the theological systems of their authorized teachers, the doctrines fall under one or the other of the following heads: God, and his relation to the world; man, including sin; Christ and his work, including the offices of the Holy Spirit; the various doctrines of grace; the church; the resurrection of the dead and other “last things.” In the main we shall follow this order.

I.

GOD.

All Christian denominations agree that God is in the highest sense a Person—that he is a Spirit infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. But they are understood to differ somewhat among themselves in respect to the practical emphasis which they place on one or another of these attributes as compared with others. Some, for example, are understood to attach a larger stress of importance to his sovereignty and justice than to his love, for instance, while others place the greater stress on his benevolence, and others, still, seek to emphasize each one as of equal importance with every other. Cumberland Presbyterians, as against their more Calvinistic brethren, have never been able to see, for instance, how God could show forth his justice in the damnation of one man and the salvation of another, both of them being regarded by him as equally meriting the former, that is to say, without any foresight on his part of faith in Christ on their part. If he had no foresight or knowledge of the cases with which he was dealing, how could he know that it was just to do this or merciful to do that? True, everything that he does is just, absolutely; but may we not say also that every-

thing he does is merciful absolutely? It seems to Cumberland Presbyterians that God must show forth his justice and mercy, not one in one man and the other in another man, but both in the same man; and they think that he does this gloriously in the salvation offered in the atoning death of Christ. This was a manifestation of both justice and mercy in the highest sense; and therefore the question whether this or that man shall show forth his justice or mercy, we make to depend on the relation of the man to Christ.

But Cumberland Presbyterians, as well as Presbyterians and Lutherans, teach very strenuously that salvation is by grace, while the Roman Catholics and some others deny, and say that at least in part it is a matter of good works. By salvation we mean here, not that life-long process which the Christian "works out with fear and trembling," but the initial fact of the Christian life which consists in having our hearts renewed, and our sins forgiven by the grace of God for the sake of Christ, and ourselves received back into the divine favor. It is exceedingly dangerous, we think, in so important a matter as this, to encourage the sinner to depend upon anything he can do himself, or upon anything that he has, such as faith, good resolutions, reformation, water baptism, etc. Cumberland Presbyterians think that "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling," should be the motto of every sinner who would entertain a rational hope of heaven. On this Rock we take our stand, and regard all else as sinking sand.

There is another way in which we can view God. We may call it the old ever interesting question concerning the relation between his knowledge and his will. It means this: You know some things as intuitions—that is, you cannot be a rational being and not know them so soon as you think of them. You know other things because you have learned them in some way. You know still other things because of an act of your will which you have put forth; as, for instance, you know that you are going to town to-day because you have determined to go; or, that your child or servant will do thus and so, because you have determined that they shall. The decree, or determination of your will, as you see, precedes this knowledge. Now the question is: “Is God’s knowledge that a certain man shall be saved, for instance, based on the decree that he shall be saved? If so, it would seem that his knowledge that another man will be lost must depend on God’s decree that he shall be lost. But how do the churches answer the question? The rigid Calvinists say, yes. The Arminians say, no. I honestly believe that Cumberland Presbyterians say yes and no both; for as everybody knows who has even a little experience with the ambiguity of words, a dogmatic affirmative does not always exclude a dogmatic negative to the same general question. Is man an animal? Yes. Is man an animal? No. In the one case I refer to his body, in the other to his soul. Our Confession of Faith says that God “freely and unchangeably ordained or determined what he himself would do,” etc. I do not suppose anybody doubts that. By his grace he saved

John Bunyan (or any other person); therefore he determined or decreed to do it. This is all plain. But the question is, which came first, his foreknowledge of John Bunyan's salvation, or his decree in regard to John Bunyan's salvation? We say both come first, and both come second. Does the decree come first? Yes and no. Does the foreknowledge come first? Yes and no. We explain thus: If we may reverently predicate past and future of God, we may say that he looks forward and sees one of his determinations of will, or decretal acts, as an accomplished fact; but we affirm that he would not foresee it as an accomplished fact without at the same time seeing that its accomplishment is due to his determination that it should be so. This sort of foreknowledge necessarily comes after the decree, and to this extent we say "yes" with our more Calvinistic brethren. But in the broader sense of the term foreknowledge—Calvin's definition of Omniscience, for instance—God must have logically foreknown all his accomplished decrees as possibilities, before he foreknew them as accomplished; for if he had not foreknown them as possibilities he never would have decreed to accomplish them. In this general sense we say that foreknowledge is logically antecedent to the decree; and in this sense we adopt the "No" of our Arminian brethren. So in our humble opinion it seems that an ambiguity has lurked in the word foreknowledge—like the whelp of the wolf which musicians tell us no man can ever chase from the piano strings.

But another question—and fortunately we have vir-

tually already answered it at least in our way—is this: Is the decree conditional or unconditional? The severer Calvinist says “unconditional,” and he means one thing; the Arminian says “conditional,” and he means another thing. How is it? Will anybody deny that the decree is conditional (1) on the antecedently seen possibility of the event which it is proposed to decree, and (2) on the wisdom and righteousness of God himself? But as the possibility or impossibility of the divinely contemplated event lies in God and not in the event itself, and as the wisdom and righteousness involved are also of the nature of God, it is unnecessary to say that the decree is not conditioned by anything outside of God himself. So far as the accomplished event is concerned, all the conditions which may be affirmed of it are already included in the decree to accomplish it, just as the decree previous to its issuance was included in the nature of God. Looking at the matter then apart from anything outside of God, we may truly say, with the Calvinist, that the decree is unconditional. But if anyone should choose to conceive of these elements of God’s nature as being projected forward into man, and as finding an objective existence in him, then he may say if he wishes to that the decree is conditioned on these elements viewed as being outside of God. That is the reason, then, as I see it, why a Cumberland Presbyterian may consistently say with the Calvinist that the decree is unconditional, and at the same time say with the Arminian that it is conditional. In the one case he speaks theologically, and in the other he

speaks anthropologically, though I do not mean that everybody who so speaks knows even what these words signify. But the Calvinist uniformly speaks in the former way, and the Arminians uniformly in the latter. I may add that I have chosen to look at this ancient question from this point of view, because our writers have been in the habit of considering it almost exclusively on what I may call its ethical side. We all know that according to the standard of righteousness which God has given us, it does not look fair that God should unconditionally select out of the human race, all of whose members are equally guilty, some men to be the objects of his mercy and love and others to be the objects of his wrath; and men can never be convinced that it is fair. But this has been said a great many times, and there was no reason, so far as I could see, why I should say it over again.

The subject will have to be referred to again when we speak, in its proper place, of our view of predestination—the word which occurs in Rom. viii. 29.

It would not be right for me to pass to my next topic before advertising the attitude of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in respect to another matter concerning which the faith of some in these days, as in all days, waxes weak. I refer to the subject of the Holy Trinity. It is a mystery; and we believe it but not because we understand it. Three eternal Persons, numerically one eternal essence or substance; the persons equal in all their attributes, but not in their

respective relations and offices; and their names are Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Here we are at one with all evangelical denominations; and we cannot change our position without at the same time breaking into pieces the whole plan of redemption. This is one chief circumstance that makes us willing to accept an incomprehensible mystery—like a great many others which we accept without questioning, every day. But we know the inadequacy of the word Person; and we know that no language, living or dead, can furnish a better one. The doctrine of the Trinity is perhaps even more explicable than that of the divine unity, in the sense in which the Unitarians use the word unity. The Unitarians and Universalists have never been known to any extent in our part of the country; and I mean nothing bad when I say that I cannot escape the belief that it would be a misfortune if they should ever gain an extensive place among us.

II.

GOD'S RELATION TO THE WORLD.

On this subject the Cumberland Presbyterian Church stands side by side with the most evangelical. Its teaching as set forth in the Confession of Faith, its pulpits, and its literature, are in harmony with the Scriptures, and are expressed to a great extent in quotations, word for word, from the holy Book. This any one may see for himself by consulting Dr. Beard's commentary on the doctrine as contained in his work on theology. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church believes that God created the heavens and the earth out of material which did not exist until he called it into being. It owes its continuous existence to his upholding power. He also governs it, causing it to work out his wise and holy purposes. He is not the author of sin; he created man, but he did not cause him to sin. His providential care extends over all his creatures, and especially over man, and more especially still over those who love and serve him. While this church believes that God is infinite in wisdom, power, and love, it believes that it is nevertheless eminently worth while for Christians to pray. It believes that prayer is a means of grace, and also a condition upon which God chooses to give many other things. But it is far

removed from any form or degree of "spiritualism," and from "faith-healing" technically so-called, and from the worse than foolish babblings of those who have stolen a good name wherewith to label a bad thing, to wit, "Christian Science."

It follows, of course, that the Cumberland Presbyterian Church does not agree with the deists who still affirm privately and in public, that the world is of the nature of a machine, like a clock for instance; and that its maker, having made it and wound it up, has nothing more to do with it.

A church that can keep its head level in these days of innumerable isms, and social, political, theological, and scientific eccentricities without number, is worthy of public confidence. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church believes that God is in his world, and that his hand works wide "through the universal frame." It speaks, in the main, with one voice. It does not take up with "every wind of doctrine" concerning providence or any thing else, and cry to-day, "Lo here," and to-morrow, "Lo there."

III.

MAN.

As for man he is the being to be saved. As originally created he was endowed with a free will, and all his affections and inclinations were toward God. Some, but not the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, teach that morally he was in a sort of equilibrium, a state midway between good and evil, or holiness and sinfulness; and that all he had to do in order to become either was to exercise his free will and move in that direction. But we believe that man had a moral character before the fall, and that this moral character consisted in a positive and decided proclivity of his will and affections toward God. His "fall" consisted in the voluntary movement of his will and affections in the opposite direction. We believe also that when he had moved himself thither he could not move himself back to his former position. He retained his will, in some sense to be sure, just as a man retains his will after he has fallen down a precipice. Apart from strength from a source other than himself, he cannot rise again. But the will is not a material body, and hence we must say even more than this. While the will after its fall is a complete will, as complete as it was before, its moral character is seriously damaged;

in fact, it has elements in it ever thereafter which were utterly foreign to it before. Just as soon after its birth as the nature of the case admits, does this new element of the will crop out and become visible in every child that has been born from that evil day to this. To speak in plain language, it is an element of rebellion against God. In the early spring if one who knows not its nature should examine with the utmost care the tender plant he could find no thistles; but they are, as everybody knows, in the nature of the plant, and as the days go by, they in due time inevitably appear. It is sad to think so, of course, but no child born of man and of woman is ever "by nature" what the first man and woman were "by nature" in their unfallen state. Some believe that there was not simply one "fall of man," but that this sad fact has been repeated in the history of every human being. This is true in a sense, of course; but the mournful difference is that no human being ever fell from a height so lofty, from an atmosphere so pure, as that from which our first parents fell. Every child is born at the place to which his first parents fell, though many of them do indeed fall thereafter to a moral level lower still. Children are a great deal more innocent than grown up people. It may indeed be said of them, in some respects, that "of such is the kingdom of heaven" here on earth. And yet there is something the matter with them. They need a Savior as we all know; and if they die in infancy that Savior, to whose care God has committed them, sees to it that their natures are fitted

for heaven. So the Cumberland Presbyterian Church teaches. It is not Pelagian. It would not be so even if it had no logical argument to the contrary, for it does not think it safe at all, in so important a matter as this to try to work out its mission of saving men by assuming that the patient is at the outset in any better moral condition than he may after all really be in. It is best to assume him to be, even if we cannot prove him to be, in a very bad condition, such as no mere human and outward applications can reach.

But do we hold that sin is a moral disease which our first parents contracted, and transmitted to us? Yes, such is our misfortune, but it is none the less also our disease, though we could not help inheriting it. We have even made it worse by pretending that we were not afflicted, or by finding a strange pleasure in the affliction, or in some other equally irrational ways which I need not here mention. But is sin nothing but a disease and a misfortune? Yes, it is a good deal more than that. It is also a crime of the deepest dye. It is a crime against the most holy and most high God. And this is the reason why another name for sin is guilt. A sinner can never realize his need of pardon who never realizes that he is guilty. Everything that is obnoxious to the holy and righteous and loving God, is criminal, and hence involves guilt. He who is guilty is under condemnation; and this is true of "all the world." Rom. iii. 19. But does this "all the world" include children? We have already said that they also need a Savior. God has mercy, surely, on the children; but he cannot have

mercy on those who need no mercy. But God's court recognizes degrees of guilt, and mitigating circumstances, just as do human courts; and, hence, whatever may be said of children as compared with grown up and hardened criminals, of course some things may be affirmed of the latter which cannot be of the former.

So the Cumberland Presbyterian Church teaches, as I have always understood, that sin does not consist simply in sinning, just as the will does not consist simply in willing, and just as moral character does not consist simply in doing right or wrong. A man has a will when he is neither willing nor wishing; he has a character, good or bad, when he is doing neither right nor wrong; if he is a sinner he is a sinner when in most unconscious sleep, as well as when engaged in most conscious acts of wickedness. And hence Cumberland Presbyterians believe that regeneration goes deeper than reformation, and that it cannot be effected by any outward appliances. Outward appliances cannot even contribute to it, any more than an eye-salve can cure heart diseases or pulmonary consumption. It cannot, therefore, seem otherwise than strange to Cumberland Presbyterians that any one should suppose for a moment that this character of the sinner can be changed, or this regeneration effected either partly or wholly, by the external application of water, as it seems the Episcopalians, Campbellites, and some others, "do vainly teach."

It seems to us that the more nearly a sinner can be induced to put the proper valuation upon his own guilt and helplessness as a sinner, the more likely will he be

to appreciate aright the Savior. No man can ever ascend to the saving recognition of Christ who does not first descend to the condemning recognition of himself as guilty and helpless. We are willing to believe, therefore, that moral obligation is not limited by moral ability. In other words, we ought to do some things which we are utterly unable to do, and if they be not done we remain under condemnation. This looks like a sad and direful situation; and that is just the thing which we wish the poor sinner to think about it, for if there is anything in this world that will make him hasten to Christ this will do it. The holy law of God says do this, and this, and do it perfectly and cordially. But he has not done it, and he cannot do it, and only as he realizes this can Christ come to his rescue. He unites himself to the sinner and the sinner becomes united to him, and henceforth and on that account the sinner is both saved and safe. In saying the things in this last paragraph, some facts of immense import are condensed into a few sentences; but as I am speaking of sin here rather than of salvation, I cannot at this place unfold them further. I refer to them here because this matter of moral obligation which we are unable to meet, renders it necessary for me to say that Cumberland Presbyterianism, like the Apostle Paul, refuses to inculcate the slightest degree of self-righteousness or self-praise because of a partial obedience. Its motto on this subject is, "All to Christ I owe;" and when it says, "Unto him be all the praise," it says it consistently and in good faith.

IV.

WHAT THINK WE OF CHRIST?

That is the next topic. By Christ we mean him who became flesh, or incarnate, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Christ is his official and redemptive name, Jesus is his individual and personal name. If we should speak of him in respect to his eternal relation to the Father his name would be "The Son." If we should speak of him as the one through whom God is revealed, his name would be Logos or Word. If we should speak of him as one who is himself God with us, we would call him Immanuel. All these are his Bible names.

The old Arians used to say that Christ is a divine person, and some modern Unitarians say the same. But we say that he is not only divine, but true deity. We are liable to be misled when we hear a modern Unitarian affirm the divinity of Christ, for he does not mean by divinity, in this case, what we mean by it. Divinity may mean, does mean, as used by some, simply a high degree of godlikeness. But it is easy to see that any one may be very godlike without in any sense being God. A good man is somewhat godlike; Gabriel is godlike is a still higher degree; Christ, as some teach, is godlike in a still higher degree, while others say that

he was simply the best man that ever lived on earth. This is not a question of curious speculation, but one of great practical as well as doctrinal importance. It would be a sad day for this wicked world if all the churches in Christendom should suddenly abandon their exalted doctrine concerning Christ. I think there would undoubtedly be a gradual relapse into a state of worldwide heathenism. For this practical reason, and for others which I cannot argue here, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church honestly believes that Christ is true, real, Deity. The Word was God; the Word was with God. These are two things which the Bible says about him. John i. 1. He was God, and he was with God. But this does not mean, of course, that he was with himself. Cumberland Presbyterians, like every body who reads the Bible, are obliged to interpret it, otherwise they might as well read it in an unknown tongue. Those interpretations which teach that the one God, the one eternal spiritual Essence, has existed eternally as a trinity of Persons, seem to them by far the most acceptable. So therefore they teach. Considered as one of these infinite and eternal Persons the name of Christ is "The Son," as I have said, or "The Second Person," as he is often called when we are not aiming to speak in Bible terms. But the two names denote the same thing, and any reader or speaker is entitled to his preference provided he does not attach false meanings to it. So far then as the person of Christ, as distinguished from his natures, is concerned, we say that it is divine in the same sense that we apply

that term to God the Father or to the Holy Spirit—eternal and infinite in all his attributes, these attributes being the same as those which we affirm of the other persons of the one Godhead.

But what of the natures of Christ? Prior to his incarnation, that is, before he “became flesh,” as Jesus of Nazareth, he had only one, and that was his divine nature; while he was on earth he had two natures, the human and the divine; and he still has these two natures. He has not a body to-day like that which he had when he was on earth, at least not like it in every respect, but he is still as human as he was then, and he is just as divine as he was before the worlds existed. The difference between him as he was before and after he took upon himself human nature lies in the fact that before that event the divine personality acted through only one nature and afterward it acts through two. This is substantially the teaching not only of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, but also of the other evangelical churches. The Unitarians do not teach it, and one or two other denominations who do not consider it to be their duty to teach anything except the importance of making public confession and submission to one or two rites of the Church. Christ is truly human and truly divine.

But do our members have to believe these things? No; they ought to, but they do not have to. A knowledge of them is, of course, not essential to salvation; and many Cumberland Presbyterians, and members of other churches, have lived and died, and gone to glory,

who have scarcely heard of these great truths and facts. But that does not imply that they are valueless, any more than the fact that many a good Christian has never had the opportunity of attending the Wednesday evening prayer meeting proves that the meeting is valueless. These great doctrines are indeed a means of grace to the common Christian who can make the proper use of them, just as the worship of God in his sanctuary is a means of grace to him who engages in it aright. That is the reason why I said a moment ago, that whereas every member of the church does not have to believe the great doctrines, he nevertheless ought to do so. But especially should the teachers in the church know of them and believe them—those unto whom is committed the oversight of the flock of Christ.

I cannot, without going beyond the boundary prescribed by these papers, present even briefly the process by which these doctrines are reached. And this is not the place for that. But I may add this practical sentence concerning the one of which I was speaking last: It is so nearly fundamental to the whole Christian system that if it were displaced the whole would fall. Christ applies to himself the words "chief corner stone;" but, as we all know, if he were not what he is he could not be that. He stands in an altogether different relation to Christianity from that in which Mohammed and Buddha stand to their respective religions, and the reason is, he himself differs in toto from Mohammed or Buddha.

V.

CONCERNING THE WORK OF CHRIST.

What shall we say now of Christ's work? This, in part. If he had not wrought in the flesh and if he did not still work out of the flesh, no man could ever have been saved and no man ever could be saved. This statement, however, emphasizes the necessity of his work, and not its nature. We believe that Christ himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, but we believe also that he is these to us in virtue of what he did and still does for us. If Gabriel had come down and lived as Christ lived, taught as he taught, suffered as he suffered, died as he died, it could not have proved effective. Man would still have been without redemption. Christ did what no other being in the universe could have accomplished, and the reason why he succeeded lies first of all in the fact that he was (and is) Christ.

But what offices, or works, does Christ execute as our Redeemer? Christ, as our Redeemer, our catechism rightly says, "executes the office of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation." As a general statement, I do not see just how this could be improved. Christ was our prophet, priest, and king, when he was on earth in the flesh, and he is these still. But how does Christ exe-

cute the office of a prophet? He does this "in revealing to us by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation." When he was on earth he did this in person in his teachings. Since his ascension he does it by his Holy Spirit who so quickens and enlightens our understandings that we may perceive the spiritual truth in the word, which spiritual truth cannot be otherwise than spiritually discerned. In the expression "the will of God," in the answer just quoted, what we may call the character of God is of course included. Christ makes him known to us as holy, just, loving, etc., presenting to us no distorted or mutilated vision of him, but one complete in all his attributes, and who in a special and precious sense is the Father of them that believe. If Christ had not wrought this revealing and instructive work as a prophet, and kept it up by his Spirit, it would have been as well had all his other work been done secretly. It could have taken no hold on men's minds and hearts, and all the world would have been in the same relation to it as the heathen.

But how does Christ execute his office of priest? In answer our catechism again rightly says: "Christ executes the office of a priest in having once offered himself a sacrifice for sin, in reconciling us to God, and in making continual intercessions for us." In respect to the first clause of this answer, we may refer to the equivalent but fuller statement in sec. 31 of our Confession, where it is said that Christ, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice became a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Like the terms father and son, for

example, the terms propitiation and expiation imply each other. There cannot be one without the other. Each is virtually defined in terms of the other. God is propitiated when sin is expiated, and sin is expiated when God is propitiated. Probably every Cumberland Presbyterian would affirm the truth of these statements; but not one of them, in using the word propitiation, would, of course, wish to be understood as intimating that God is a vengeful tyrant. If he had not loved the fallen world with a Godlike love, he would not have put forth what we may reverently call a Godlike effort to save it. The measure of his love was the reluctance (if we may speak humanly), with which he yielded up his Son. John iii. 16. The priestly work of Christ on earth was as wide as the world and the ages both in its intention and its sufficiency. But Cumberland Presbyterians do not teach that all men will be saved. We wish we could so teach. But the reason why we cannot does not lie in God. "How often would I," he says, "and ye would not." Matt. xxiii. 37. I suppose that we can never know in this world or the next how deep and keen is the grief of Christ because so many sinners reject him. But the church is not to be held responsible for this humanistic statement, though surely there must be a mournful and mysterious fact corresponding to it. Christ is as human to-day as he was when he sat on the brow of Olivet, overlooking with prophetic vision the sinful city which he loved so well. And yet "he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Isa. liii. 11. "He ever liveth to make in-

tercession," and "is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Heb. vii. 24, 25. No others can he save.

Not only is he "a priest forever;" he is also king. But how does he execute the office or work of a king? I answer again by quoting our catechism: "Christ executes the office of a king in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies." He does it also—or I may rather say, that is—in calling out of the world a people to himself, known as the church; in giving them officers, laws, and censures when they need them, by which he visibly governs those who have once become attached unto him, or united with him, by faith in bestowing abiding saving grace; in rewarding their obedience and correcting them for their sins; in preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings; and in causing all things to work together for their good and his glory. It is probable that our Methodist and Episcopal friends who deny the doctrine of "inamissible grace" and insert in its place the doctrine of total and final apostasy, would move to strike out of the above list of Christ's kingly functions the clause beginning, "in bestowing abiding saving grace." It devolves on me here, not to argue, but simply to say that while Cumberland Presbyterians teach, of course, that those who have once become savingly united to Christ, may grievously backslide, they believe that the Scriptures teach that Christ, in the exercise of his kingly office, will see to it that none are finally lost. But we

shall necessarily have to allude to this subject again under another head.

Christ's priestly work on earth and in heaven is the ground, the essential antecedent, of all the work of the Holy Spirit looking to our complete salvation and glorification. It is on this ground that he reproveth or convicts the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. John xvi. 8. Apart from this priestly work neither repentance nor faith could ever be effected or produced in the heart of the sinner. It is the ground of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. It is the ground of justification. It is the ground upon which the Holy Spirit aids the believer in his work of progressive sanctification. It is, in short, the thing without which nothing else whatever in the whole scheme of redemption, or in the whole process of salvation, would ever take place. Apart from this ground on which to move every redemptive agency in the universe would be silent and motionless. The Holy Spirit would retire back into eternity into the society of the Father and the Son who sent him. Every call of the ministry of the gospel would be withdrawn; every house of God would be closed, and every pulpit silent. Every regenerate soul would relapse back into its original state. Our civilization would become savagery, and Satan, that old Dragon, would stalk up and down this world tyrannizing over his victims without hindrance. Truly, of Christ it may be said again, "All to him we owe." And, if I may speak a truth in figure, his scarred hands are a perpetual intercession for us all.

VI.

PREDESTINATION, JUSTIFICATION, REGENERATION.

Having written of the work of Christ to the extent of our limit let us now consider briefly its application in the actual salvation of men. Dr. Beard in his *Theology* devotes 125 pages to the subject of predestination. He says that as the word is usually understood Cumberland Presbyterians have no doctrine of predestination. This is true. Dr. Beard teaches, however, that we have a doctrine on this subject, though it does not occur as a formal and explicit article in our Confession. Our articles on the "preservation of believers" imply it. Of course also we believe that Rom. viii. 29 and Eph. i. 5 teach something on the subject of predestination. They are affirmative sentences, and not negative ones. The one says that God "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself," etc. The other says that "whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son," etc. Both these propositions are addressed to persons who are already Christians, just as Phil. ii. 12, 13 is; and of course Cumberland Presbyterians believe the Bible. Such verses as these are the good logical foundation of our doctrine of the preservation of the believer, or the "final perseverance of the saints." But the question

might arise, Is this predestination unconditional? Our answer is, These verses themselves do not say that it is, then why should we? It is true that God's determination to take care of the believer in Christ, seeing to it that he is not finally lost, is a matter of pure grace on his part; no power or authority outside of himself makes him do it. In this sense of course it is a sovereign and unconditional act. But the word "unconditional" is usually understood to mean that, of two men, for instance, irrespective of their relation to Christ, God predestinated one to eternal life and the other to eternal death. This sort of unconditional predestination Cumberland Presbyterians do not believe. We may add that this species of predestination of some unto eternal life inevitably implies a like unconditional predestination of others unto eternal damnation. It is not a mere negative "passing over;" for, according to the system which holds this view, God cannot foreknow that an event will come to pass unless he has decreed that it shall come to pass—from which it of course follows that he could not foreknow that a given sinner will finally be lost unless he has decreed that he shall be lost. But he knows it, therefore he decreed it. This is not our doctrine. We believe that whatever God predestinated concerning the finally impenitent, he predestinated concerning him as being out of Christ; and whatever opposite things he predestinated concerning another man, he predestinated concerning him as being in Christ. The doctrine of our Methodist brethren on the subject of "apostasy"—or, more properly speaking, the doctrine of "amis-

sible grace"—logically forbids them from having any doctrine of predestination at all.

But, as we are obliged to be brief, let us pass on and state what we believe concerning regeneration. It is a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit by which the heart is radically changed. We call it a "renewal in spirit," a making one to be a "new creature in Christ," a being "born of the will of God," etc. We mean by heart or spirit the whole inmost purpose of the man. Regeneration affects, not merely the man's conduct, but himself in the inmost seat of his character and life; it affects him in the immanent and permanent state of his will and affections. Psychologically he is the same man, of course; if he was John Smith before, he is John Smith after regeneration. But the trend of the man, his inmost character, his immanent purpose, or whatever one may call it, is not the same. He is a "new man," born from above. If a man would be a lawyer he must be more than a member of the bar, more than a mere "practitioner." He must have the traits, the mental habits, the immanent mental states, of a lawyer; otherwise he is "no lawyer," no matter how well informed in law he may be. He must be of the judicial type of a man, as distinguished from other types. Regeneration quickens in man the life or movement which ultimately brings him over from the worldly and carnal to the well defined spiritual type. This quickening is instantaneous, and is accomplished, not by water, or the sacraments, not by human power, but by the Holy Spirit. The further progress of the movement, after the in-

stantaneous quickening or regeneration, is gradual. It is called sanctification—progressive sanctification. We shall speak of it more particularly later on.

What, now, is justification? The sinner is the object of the justifying act, truly, but it does not take place in the sinner, in the sense that regeneration does, but outside of the sinner, at Heaven's court. It includes not only pardon, but also restoration to God's favor, and the enjoyment of the privileges of sonship. It does not consist in making one subjectively righteous, or holy, or innocent. We as Cumberland Presbyterians regard our Confession of Faith as a good interpretation of Scripture on this subject. It says that justification is accomplished, "not by imputing faith itself"—which means that we do not believe that faith and righteousness are identical things called by two different names. The article in the Confession also says that sinners are not justified by the imputation to them of "any other evangelical obedience." It says that God freely justifies sinners "by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on his righteousness by faith." It says also that this act of God is "strictly a legal transaction," and "imparts no normal qualities or merits to the believer," he being relieved from punishment and received into the divine favor "for Christ's sake alone." In heartily believing all this we are in the good company of the framers, not only of our old, but also of our Revised Confession.

Our Methodist brethren do not quite agree with us in this view of justification. Rev. Richard Watson, an

eminent Methodist theologian, says that our faith itself is our righteousness, being imputed to us as such; whereas our Confession says that the obedience and satisfaction of Christ are imputed to us as such. See Watson's Institutes, vol. ii. page 234; our Confession, sections 48, 49, 50; Westminster Confession, chapter xi. Another difference between us and our Methodist friends on this subject lies in our difference of view in regard to faith in its relation to justification. We emphasize it in this relation rather as an act of accepting Christ which results in our permanent justification; they emphasize it rather as an inward state on our part which is reckoned to us as justification or righteousness only so long as we are in that state. This state is the "grace from which we may fall." The doctrine of "apostasy" is therefore logically related to the Methodist doctrine of justification, but it is not logically related to ours. Of course we believe that faith appears as an inward state of trust, but this is not what we mean when we speak of faith as the instrumental cause of justification. The result of the act of faith, to wit, justification in our sense of the word, we think is permanent; hence we do not believe in falling from this grace. But the synonym of the state of faith or trust, to wit, justification in the other sense of the word, lasts only so long as that state lasts. Hence our Methodist friends do believe that we may fall from this grace. This is what they mean by their doctrine of "apostasy," or "amissible grace." We believe that true Christians may sin, or pass into states of spiritual gloom and discouragement on account of a

failure to trust Christ, but we do not believe that this ever cancels the justifying act of God which took place on the occasion of the sinner's act of faith—that is to say, his act of accepting Christ as his Lord and Savior.

I believe that I have set forth these two views of justification as fairly as could be done in the space of a few words. It is perhaps needless to say that I prefer our own, and that as for my reader, I can only leave him to the exercise of his judgment. I may add, in conclusion, that the Roman Catholics hold still a different view of justification, in which they do not distinguish, as good teachers ought to do, between it and regeneration and sanctification. They say that justification consists in the infusion of God's own righteousness into the soul of the sinner so that it becomes the property or characteristic of that soul. The reader may easily see the difference between this view and our own as presented in our Confession of Faith, in the articles from which we have quoted.

VII.

SACNTIFICATION.

Our next topic is sanctification. What is it? It is not regeneration; it is not justification; it is not sinless perfection, nor the "second blessing" technically so called. There is no such thing in the creed of any church as the dogma of sanctification in the sense of sinless perfection; nor is there any such thing in the Scriptures. The only sense in which sinless perfection is to be affirmed of anyone is a relative sense. Some men in some respects are better than others; and the best are the first ones to recognize their own unworthiness. They are even more likely perhaps to think of their own sinfulness than of the sinfulness of their brethren. Every man begins the Christian life by pleading the merits of Christ rather than his own; and the only way that he can keep on being a Christian is to keep on pleading the merits of Christ rather than his own. Far be it from any Christian to get into the habit of depending upon his experiences. There is too much bad mingled with the best. No man can ever get away from his record. If he is a sinner once he is a sinner forever; a murderer once, a murderer forever. There is an important sense in which this is a solemn, even an awful truth, and probably we do not take it home to ourselves

as we ought. I think if we did we would appreciate ourselves less and Christ more. If one of our fellow citizens has served a term in the penitentiary for a disgraceful crime committed he can never escape that record, though this, we may say, is due to our want of charity. Still it is true that no sinner can ever escape his record. I do not mean to teach, of course, that he ought to remain hung up day after day in the sorrowful memory of his past; but it is there nevertheless, and every once and awhile it will look humiliation at him from behind the back of God whither it has been cast. He will know that it is there. David, who wrote the most penitential of psalms, is in heaven to-day; but he is there as a murderer as well as a psalmist; a pardoned murderer, to be sure, but none the less a murderer. He had to plead guilty before he could plead Christ. Neither regeneration, nor justification, nor sanctification, ever wipes out or annihilates facts. The effects of facts may be neutralized, or counteracted, or overlooked in some way, but the facts themselves are facts forever. If a man has once stolen, if we are merciless enough to do so we may truly say of him ever afterward, "You thief," no matter how penitent and pious he may become. It is love and mercy that prevent us from doing it. So it is the case of the penitent, pardoned, and regenerated sinner against God. His character is changed, but his personal identity is not. And when we speak so gratefully and so truly of Christ's washing all our sins away, or all our guilt, we do not mean that he washes away our culpability or

unworthiness. While there is an important sense in which the sinner must be fitted for heaven, he will never agree, I should think, that apart from Christ he is fit for heaven. If Christ should turn against the saved sinner a million years hence, that saved sinner would immediately be undone. His criminal and polluted record, made before he was saved and after, would instantly leap in vengeance from behind the back of God. The old scores would ruin him inevitably. It is only Christ who keeps them in the back ground. Think thyself a sinner, good man, however perfect God may know thee to be. Put thy mouth in the dust, and honestly cry as did the prophet of old, unholy, unholy. It will be the best testimony in thine own favor that thou couldst possibly give, whether wittingly or unwittingly. My lamp is brighter in the darkness than it is in the light of noonday. The nearer we approach, in our own attainments, the ineffable brightness of God's holiness the less holy does our own holiness seem. I may think I can write well, until I see my writing side by side with one which is far better than mine. Then I am humbled. I think the Apostle Peter must have been influenced by this fact once, when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." That was his vigorous way of saying that he had caught a larger and more brilliant glimpse than usual of Christ's perfect holiness, and his own seemed dark in comparison. If Christ had frequently flashed out the brilliant reality of his holiness, I suppose that even the poor disciples would have been discouraged and driven

away from him, to say nothing of the poor publicans and sinners. He had to insist that he was the Son of man, in order that they might at last know that he was the Son of God. He had to conceal in order that he might reveal.

But what is sanctification then? Of course any man may put upon any word whatever meaning he may choose to put upon it, and go about using it in that sense. But in theology, as in every other science, certain words have several accepted meanings. Sometimes the same word in English is represented by several different words in the Greek or Hebrew Scriptures. And sometimes again the etymology of a word is not worth any thing whatever in determining its meaning in a given passage or connection. This is true in English, and also in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and other literatures. Words sometimes, oftentimes indeed, grow far away from their birthplace, just as a man may outgrow the humble circumstances of his childhood. It matters nothing, so far as the Scriptures are concerned, or so far as the church doctrine of sanctification is concerned, to say that the word comes from *sanctus* holy and *facio* to make. Any body can know that by looking in a dictionary. A church doctrine is formulated not merely, sometimes perhaps not at all, by consulting etymologies, but by ascertaining the whole trend of Scripture teaching, as presented even in passages where the given word does not occur at all. All Christians in the apostolic days were called "holy ones" or saints. This was one of their common titles, just as we call them "breth-

ren," or "Christians." But it would be wrong to argue from this that in the days of the apostles they were "sanctified" in the sense in which that word is now often misused. It is well known that some of these holy ones were notoriously unholy or imperfect, as at Corinth, for instance.

As a church doctrine—and the church is supposed to get its doctrines from the Bible—sanctification denotes in the first place consecration to God, and then, in the case of Christians, continuous growth in grace, as the result of this consecration. So far as the official teachings of the Protestant Churches are concerned, there is great unanimity on this subject, however, numerous may be the individuals in some who dissent. The official teaching, as contained in creeds, catechisms, etc., represents the concensus. If a member of a church thinks that he is obliged to dissent from this concensus, he has the right to do so; but in this day and time, when all are equally uninspired, if the dissenting man can remain with his church without disturbing it, he ought to do so; but if he cannot he ought to withdraw. That is the way Luther did. Any church member is taking upon himself a great responsibility when he undertakes to reverse the long established faith of a whole Christian denomination. The one man may be wrong, and the many right.

Certainly we are commanded to be holy even as God is holy; to be perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect. What lower standard could have possibly been set? But we cannot attain unto it. It

is beyond the utmost reach of us little ones. But we can desire to reach it, and we can make progress even in this life. We can grow in grace and all the graces can grow in us. That is, we can grow in grace if we appropriate to ourselves the nutritious means of grace, living at first perhaps only on the sincere or unadulterated milk of the word, and afterward also on the stronger meat. And the graces can also grow in us provided the soil be adapted to their growth. But alas, so many of the good seeds do fall on ground wherein they cannot grow. Still, it is the privilege of every true Christian to realize in himself this continuous growth. However much better any one may really be than his brethren—and some no doubt are holier than others—sad is it for him who is willing to say of himself, “See how large I am,” or who is willing to affirm that he has attained to the perfect standard. If in the ages hence he should compare himself, as he may be then, with himself as he is now even at his best, in shame I suppose he would hastily turn his eyes away. There would be so many black, and foul, and dismal spots on the escutcheon of his ancient glory. And if he should compare himself then with the holy Christ, he also as do the great angels whom we call holy, would prostrate himself before the throne and say of himself, “Unholy, unholy,” and of him that sitteth upon the throne, “Holy, holv. holy, is the Lord of hosts.” We have never seen any holiness in this world, all that we call by that name being only the faint and far away image of it. How then can

any one venture to say that he is perfectly sanctified? Ought he not rather to bow his head in shame?

It is easy to see, then, from this description of the doctrine of sanctification, the difference between it and other doctrines of grace which we have also briefly described. Regeneration is a spiritual quickening; sanctification is a spiritual consecration and growth. Regeneration is wrought by the Holy Spirit; our sanctification is accomplished by ourselves with the aid of the Holy Spirit and the use of the means of grace. It is this that the apostle has in mind when he says, "Work out your own salvation." Phil. ii. 12, 13. Regeneration is essentially an instantaneous work; sanctification is progressive, as the light shineth more and more as it approaches the perfect day. Regeneration is as the quickening of the seed; sanctification is its subsequent development and growth. So, they both differ from justification. Regeneration and sanctification take place in us; justification takes place at Heaven's court, it being we here who are justified there—not because we are really guiltless, but for Christ's sake. Regeneration and sanctification are moral or spiritual works; justification "is strictly a legal transaction." Thus do the Protestant Churches teach on this subject, their teachings being embodied in what we may call their official utterances. These churches are composed of learned and devout men whose only purpose and desire is to know the truth and promulgate it.

VIII.

THE CHURCH.

We come now to speak of the church. The church is supposed to have a doctrine concerning itself. It surely ought to have, if it would do its work intelligently and well in other respects. "Know thyself" is in substance a Scriptural injunction, and it may be truly regarded as addressed not only to the individual Christian, but also to the aggregate and organized body of Christians called the Church. The injunction needs to be emphasized. Our Confession of Faith states the well known distinctions between the visible and invisible church, which I need not quote here. It also applies the word church to a single organized congregation of Christians; and to an organized collection of any number of such congregations, often called a "Christian denomination." If there were only one or two Christians on earth they could still be spoken of as "the church." And we also speak of the church militant and the church triumphant, meaning by the former the number of God's people who are still on earth at any given time, and by the latter those who are in heaven and whose struggles have terminated in victory. All these senses of the word are recognized in Christian literature, and most of them, if not all, are found in the New Testament. But there is a unity in the variety, just as there must be something in common with a rose, and

a poem, and a mathematical demonstration, and a piece of moral conduct, which justifies us in calling them all beautiful. What is this unity, this common thing, which we find in so many applications of the word "church?" Some deny—the Roman Catholics notably—that there is any such higher unity. The Roman Catholics have their own "notes" or marks of the church, and they define the thing and restrict the application of the word accordingly. Hence a member of the Presbyterian Church, for example, is not, in their estimation, a member of the church. So with some other "Christian denominations," as for instance, the Episcopal. It is a part of the doctrine of these concerning the church to deny the existence of any such unity, or thing in common, as entitles other Christian bodies to be called the Church. Some make baptism by immersion an indispensable "note" or mark of the church. But the Lutheran "Church," and the various Presbyterian "Churches" and the various Methodist "Societies," or "Connections," or "Churches," are not so restrictive in their application of the word. I suppose that they would all admit that a bond of unity is the spiritual fellowship with the Lord Jesus the great Head of all. Hence these might apply the term church to the people of God in the Old Testament times. In the patriarchal age they might be called the Patriarchal church; in the age later the Theocratic church or kingdom and in the Christian age the Christian church. In this case while the form changes, the essence remains the same, and men in all ages are saved in essen-

tially the same way. Hence the bond, or thing in common, uniting these various forms might be called the purpose and plan of God to save mankind, these varying forms being the outward expression or embodiment of this purpose and plan. It is for this reason that every church organization, every church building, institution, ordinance, may itself, if rightly interpreted, be called a mute yet voiceful proclamation of glad tidings. Each means so much more than it seems to say. We can see from this point of view, to say nothing of any other, how improper it would be to call the organized form of any heathen "religion" a church. The heathen religions in their outward forms are not authorized or any other kind of embodiment or expression of the divine purpose and plan of redemption.

But I do not suppose that any even of the liberal "denominations" would be willing to call the "Young Men's Christian Association" a church or the church, in the more restricted and technical sense of the word. It does not call itself a church in this sense, nor even a branch of it. What "notes" does it lack? In its capacity as such it does not administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper; it does not ordain men to the ministry of the gospel; it is not under the auspices or guidance of any bishop, or ecclesiastical judicature, or court, nor is it one in itself. In this aspect of independency and irresponsibility, it differs from the Sunday schools, the Leagues, and the Societies of Christian Endeavor. But it is an organization of Christian young men which has done much good which

it was supposed the church could not or would not do. It is in theory of course a sad reflection upon the church, for it is always a pity that it should under any circumstances be necessary to say that the church is either incompetent or unwilling to do "the whole work of an evangelist," and to do it well.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church, as its name implies, is Presbyterian in its form of organization. All churches are in a general sense episcopal. In ours and the other Presbyterian Churches, the Episcopal function is lodged in the Presbytery, which is composed of a number of under bishops and lay elders. As compared one with another these "under bishops" are of equal authority and dignity, but they are subordinate to the presbytery. The presbytery has a long list of duties marked out for it, and a larger authority than it usually exercises but not larger than it ought to exercise—provided it were in every instance as wise as a serpent and as devoid of evil as a dove, like it ought to be.

But the function of no church terminates upon its own machinery. Beyond looking after its own material well being what is the function or duty of the church? The answer is: (1) To receive the truth, (2) to conserve or take care of the truth, (3) to promulgate the truth. The source whence it receives the truth is its great Head. From him to it are committed the oracles of God which we call the Holy Scriptures. Before there was a Bible the church received the truth in special unwritten revelations; but it does not so receive it now. It receives it now as handed down through the genera-

tions in written form. In conserving it, it sees to it that the written oracles are not adulterated by misleading interpolations or additions, and that constituent parts thereof are not excinded, and that none are grossly misinterpreted. Here lies the advantage on the part of the different "Christian denominations" in having a great many commentators and expounders of the oracles. It is like having a complicated system of accounts gone over by a great many different accountants. If one makes an error, whether intentionally or inadvertently, another may detect it. The church promulgates the truth either by disseminating the Scriptures in the very letter thereof, or else in expositions and enforcements of the word in the form of sermons, lectures, homilies, and religious literature of various kinds. These are the ways in which the church bears witness for Christ and persuades men to be "reconciled to God."

But this leads me to say that the church in looking after itself needs to do much more than to look after the well being of its machinery or organism. There may be an excellent machinery considered merely as machinery; but it may not put forth its utmost effort, and what it does may be done badly. Unless it does more than look after its machinery, it cannot receive the truth intelligently; it cannot conserve the truth without doing it accidently; it cannot promulgate the truth with any reasonable assurance that it is not at the same time publishing much error. It may have much intelligence and little piety, or much piety and little intelligence. It may have much ballast and no steam, or

much steam and no ballast. In view of such serious considerations the church—any church, I mean—ought readily to see its duty. As a whole, as well as in its individual members and ministers, it ought to be a skilled workman, one that will give itself no occasion to blush. The church is a divine institution, but, except him of whom it is the body, it is made out of human material. This material, as a whole and in every part, ought to see to it that it is qualified for the work whereunto it is called.

But why should the church have a creed? For the same reason, in part at least, that a State should have a constitution. In union there is strength, but there can be no union where there is no bond of union. The Bible is obliged to be expounded, and there ought to be considerable unanimity of interpretation especially of what are regarded as the great fundamental truths. They that fear the Lord speak often one to another; but they cannot speak with much edification if they speak in divers tongues. So it is well that they should agree upon what they can agree upon, and group themselves off accordingly, each group under its own vine and fig tree—which we call a creed. It is simply “I believe.”

With one brief word on the subject of eschatology, or the “Last Things,” I close this series. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church believes that the eternal destiny of every man is determined this side of the grave. As it reads the Bible, and in the face of the awful issues, it dares not teach any thing else.

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