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A FORMER PASTOR'S LETTER.

C. L. CONNELL,

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Dear Brother: Your note, stating that you and the Church of which you are the pastor, desire me to write to you, is at hand. Not doubting the general interest of yourself and those for whom you speak, in the welfare of a former pastor whose relations were mutually of the most amicable kind, I still suppose that it is particularly on account of my having withdrawn from the ministry and membership in the M.E. Church that you desire to hear. To those who listened to my preaching during my pastorate at Townsendville, it is unnecessary to state that I was at the time a Methodist. My notions of the teachings of Scripture were gained while yet a child. They were taught me by Methodist parents, in Methodist Sunday-schools, from Methodist pulpits.

I find that years before I was capable of forming for myself intelligent opinions concerning even the general scope of Scripture teaching, they had already been moulded, and I had unquestioningly accepted the opinions of others and made them my own. I am now disposed to believe, however, that it was with some degree of mental reservation that I accepted some of the doctrines of orthodoxy. How else could I, while professing to believe in endless torment for the unrepentant, associate with them, accept their many kindnesses, and speak to them from the pulpit on themes often tending to divert their attention from, rather than attract it toward, so horrible a fate. I believe, however, that by the churches I served I was adjudged faithful to my duties; and though coming short of my own model of what a minister of Christ should be, I have the happy consciousness of having ordinarily walked up to the degree of light I possessed. To

relate my varied and peculiar experiences after resigning my pastorate at Townsendville, would transcend the limits of an ordinary letter, and perhaps would be without interest to those for whom I write. Suffice it to say, that after about two years of such experiences, there fell into my hands, providentially as it seems to me, a publication which was the means of a decided change in my understanding of much of God's Word; a change, however, which led me to much more exalted views of the character of God, and served to harmonize many passages in his Word, which before appeared either unmeaning or contradictory.

Though disposed to look with much suspicion on all that cast a doubt on orthodox teachings, I nevertheless found them so fatally assailed by God's own Word, that my prejudices one by one yielded, and the foundation, having given way, the superstructure crumbled and lay in a mass of ruins at my feet. You are now ready to ask, which of these doctrines appear to me to be out of harmony with the teaching of the Word. The present opportunity will allow me to speak of but few of these, and I will select such as I trust will appear plain to you. Orthodoxy teaches that the present life irrevocably determines the future condition of every human being. Though it is nowhere stated in Scripture that there is not for any a probation after this life, it is **[R447 : page 6]** preached and enforced much more vigorously than many things which the Bible does affirm.

If it be true, as preached, that there will be no probation after this life, then surely much the larger part of the human family never have a probation. No person can be said to have a probation until made acquainted with that for which he is to be held accountable. Besides, if there be no future probation, many passages of the sacred Word, are to me unmeaning; nay, more, are positively contradictory. Please notice Luke 2:10: "Behold I bring you good tidings of GREAT JOY, which shall be to ALL PEOPLE."

We are all aware that a large majority of the PEOPLE who have lived and died, even since these words were uttered, never heard of the event here referred to. In what sense, therefore, has it been GREAT JOY to them? What possible advantage can they have derived from it?

Again, in John 1:9, it is stated of Jesus, "That was the true light which lighteth EVERY MAN that cometh into the world." How, permit me to ask, has he lighted those millions of the race who never heard of him? How can this be true, unless there is to be a trial for them in the future in which this light shall be received? Again, in 1 Tim. 2:6, it is stated that Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for ALL, to be testified in DUE TIME. Now, we all know, that it has not yet been testified to ALL.

But, if this Scripture be true, it will be; so we can reach no other conclusion than that the DUE TIME – God's DUE TIME – for much the larger part of the [R447 : page 7] human family to receive this testimony will be FUTURE.

I might cite many other passages that are susceptible of a rational interpretation only in this light, but surely they will occur to your minds.

But, you may ask, why is it not taught in the Scripture, if there is to be an opportunity for those who have never heard of him of whom it is declared, "There is no other name given under heaven, among men whereby we must be saved?" To this I answer, it is so taught, and not in a single text merely, but in many Scriptures. Before referring you to such teachings, however, permit me the remark, that the doctrine of a future probation for the world is not more strange to nominal Christianity to-day than was that of a salvation for the Gentiles to the Jewish Church at Christ's first coming. In illustrating my position, I will call attention to a single instance from Scripture; not because it does not contain others, but because the limits

prescribed me will not permit their notice. This one instance, however, will be sufficient, I trust, to answer every reasonable objection.

We will select what is usually regarded as the most marked illustration of Divine wrath, viz.: the Sodomites. Now, if we can show from the plain statements of God's Word that these people are to come back to life, in order that they may have an opportunity of having it testified to them that Jesus Christ gave himself a ransom for all, of believing this testimony if they will, and of receiving the benefits of belief, viz.: justification: if we make this plain, then we think the case of the others will appear, at least, very hopeful. But, first, let us learn from the Great Teacher, who "knew what was in man," what he thought of these Sodomites.

In his preaching he compared them with the Jews, and particularly with the people of favored Capernaum (Matt. 11:23,24.) Jesus here says, "If the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

Thus we see that it was for want of light that these people were destroyed. We see also that Jesus teaches a time of retribution – future – which shall be tolerable for ALL, even for the people of CAPERNAUM, who rejected Jesus and his miracles; and yet MORE TOLERABLE for the SODOMITES that perished in ignorance. Are we not all ready to say, this is surely, as we have a right to suppose God would deal, with those to whom in their lifetime he had never given light and knowledge?

Now, turn if you please to the prophet Ezekiel, 16th chapter, and see that God is teaching the Jews of their final restoration to the "land of promise," as he had long before promised to Abraham.

Please bear in mind that the prophet is writing about 1,000 years after the destruction of this people, and that Jesus says (Luke 17:29), "It rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them ALL." Notice now, that in the 46th verse the prophet refers both to the people of Samaria and to those of Sodom, and in the 53d and 55th verses plainly states that these people who were ALL destroyed SHALL RETURN to their FORMER ESTATE. In the 60th and 61st verses it is again stated that God will establish with Israel an everlasting covenant, and that he will give to her Samaria and Sodom for daughters (that she may instruct them and bring them into harmony with God's plans). Thus we see that the promised blessing to Israel is not alone for herself, but that she may be God's agency in extending light and knowledge to "ALL PEOPLE."

How well this comports with Peter's words (Acts 3:21), in which he declares the "times of restitution of all things, God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." A careful study of these holy prophets can scarcely fail to discover this glorious doctrine of a restitution of all things interwoven in all their writings. We are able in this light to comprehend John's definition of God's character – (1 Jno. 4:8) – "God is love." Is it not notably the case that the fear of future torment is the principal incentive held out to induce men to come to God? John says, however, that – "He that loveth not knoweth not God."

Another teaching of the nominal Church, which I believe to be at variance with the teaching of the Word is, that all believers are to be of the body or Bride of Christ. The Bible teaches that the result of belief is justification to that condition which Adam forfeited by his disobedience. He forfeited human perfection; moral – mental – physical. Belief in the atonement is the one condition to its final recovery. The conditions to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14); the holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9); the heavenly calling (Heb.

3:1), are far different. These require not only justification, but that their justified human nature shall be presented to God a living sacrifice – conditions which never were required until the narrow way to life was opened up by Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:20; Matt. 7:14). Those who follow Jesus' footsteps in this narrow way are promised immortality "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (Jno. 5:26); and we (his body) shall be like him (1 Jno. 3:2), spiritual beings, no longer human, but partakers of the Divine nature.

By rejecting the Bible doctrine of a future probation – after the dead shall have heard the voice of the Son of God and come forth, as illustrated in the case of Lazarus, the widow's son and others – by rejecting this and other Bible teachings, the nominal Church has been thrown into confusion and led into many errors.

That this confusion and these errors have largely contributed toward bringing about a rapid increase of infidelity, both within and without her own pale, I firmly believe. What is the spiritual condition of the Church to-day? Where are the wonderful revivals of former years? Alas, they exist only in name, or are the result of the efforts of a few professional revivalists. The barriers that formerly separated between the Church and the world are mostly swept away, and the man of fair worldly prospects, with whom she refuses to share all her privileges, must fall below the world's standard of morality.

These, dear brethren, are some of the causes which led me to sever a connection, which I once so highly prized, and to accept doctrines which, though they may bring reproach and obloquy, I believe to rest on the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

Commending you to God, who is able to make all grace abound toward you, and trusting that this letter may lead you to a more

careful study of His Word, which only is able to make you wise unto salvation, and to trust less in human creeds and traditions, I remain,

Your servant, for Christ's sake.

S. T. TACKABURY.

Fostoria, Ohio,

Feb. 6th, 1883.
