

BIBLICAL RECORDER

RALEIGH, N. C., WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 1903.

JOSIAH WILLIAM BAILEY, EDITOR.

VOLUME 69, NUMBER 4.

CUT THEM OFF; THEY ARE KILLING THE CHURCH.

Why does the revival not come? Why do not the thousands of churches take the world for Christ? What is the matter with the Power of God?

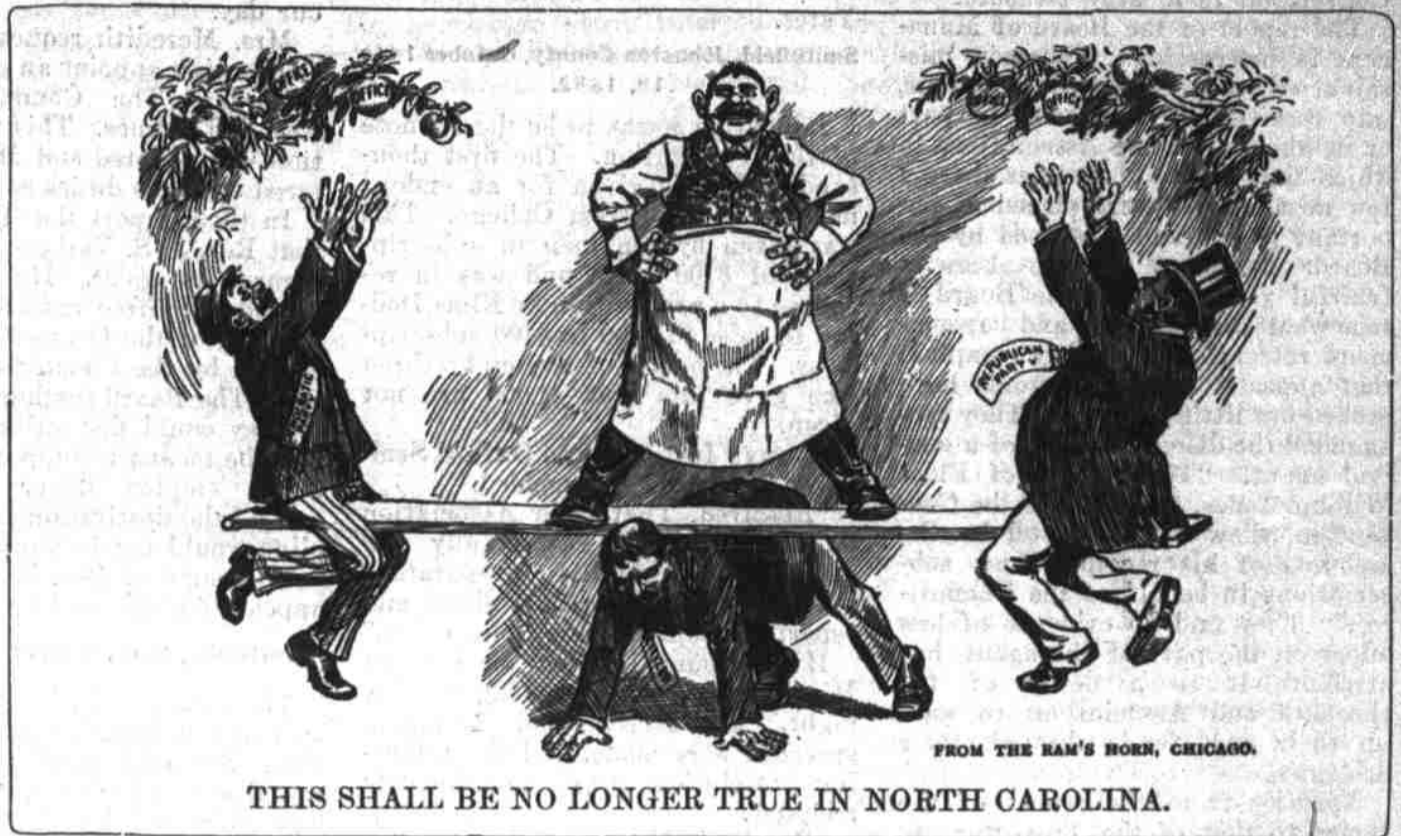
There is no mark of modern Christianity more significant, more indicative of the unhealthy state of the churches, more worthy of the grave concern of those who long for the manifestation of the ancient power of the Risen Lord dwelling in His chosen and working in His church,—no mark so striking as this, that the churches of the Living God are no longer alert and straight to discipline. They have lost their power to purge themselves!

The live body throws off dead matter daily. Life is a process of taking in living matter and putting out the dead. But by this sign the churches of today are dead. They do take in living members—comparatively few, however; but they do not throw off the dead. And the living ones all but perish within them. The branches do not purge themselves. The Vine is pure; and He will purge Himself of such branches. Very likely this explains the absence of that power of the Risen and Indwelling Christ. He is Risen indeed; but He has ceased to dwell in bodies that would not purge themselves. Unregenerate or unworthy church-members are not merely a hindrance and reproach; they are poison in the body of Christ.

It was said in the beginning that Christianity should be known by its fruits. The Master Himself gave and approved this test. The power of Christianity, or of its vessels, the individual and the church, is tested, is measured, by its fruits. A church, therefore, half full of rotten members is a reproach, yea a condemnation of Christianity and poison destroying the body of Christ Himself. Men who are believers but who are not church-members stand boldly among us and say that the church is not worth joining; that the percentage of bad men in the church is about as large as the percentage outside; and that they cannot, therefore, see what there is in joining the church. It is not separate from the world. The world is in the church and the church is in the world. They say these things, and church members and ministers cannot deny them; and the effort to explain them away but makes the matter worse. There is, of course, somewhat to be said. The churches are doing some work. There are some good people, worthy Christians, in the churches. Church-membership is worth while. We may even go so far as to say that the non-church members have absolutely no excuse in the condition of the churches for remaining outside. Their duty is to do their duty, no matter who else fails. It will avail them nothing in the day of Judgment to allege that So and So, church-member, was a worlding or a hypocrite. Nevertheless it must be conceded that the state of the churches is bad; that their salt has largely lost its savor and that their light is dim; that church-membership is no longer a mark of holiness, no longer a mark of separation, no longer a badge of distinction; and that, no matter whether these things are a legitimate excuse for men to remain outside or not, they are a reproach to the Holy Christ and a mockery of the Living God; that they have made of no account the power of the Gospel; crippled the preachers, and brought religion into contempt. They explain the present failure of the church to be all-powerful.

These be plain words, but we call the reader for witness to their truth.

We say that the churches have lost their power to purge themselves; and that an unclean church



THIS SHALL BE NO LONGER TRUE IN NORTH CAROLINA.

is a puny—a powerless church; that Christ Himself is handicapped by a church that is full of dead branches; that by His own test—the test of fruits, that is, of capacity to bring forth righteousness and faith and nobler living,—He is proven inefficient. He stands defeated—and betrayed—by His own disciple once again.

We are doing considerable money-raising; we are building schools and sending out missionaries. These are good. But they do not make the whole of Christianity. Nor do all the well-known denominational objects combined make Christianity. Pure religion is personal. It is in the heart, in the mind, in the self. It is what you are, not what you do. We should do these things; but we should put the emphasis upon personal religion, personal holiness, personal soul-winning. Only so shall the churches return to their power and the great revival come.

The churches must be aroused. They must acquire new courage. They must return to the old standards of high. The liar, the drunkard, the usurer, the worlding, the indifferent, the slothful, must be turned out. These dead branches must be cut off. Else the churches will remain—dead and dying. The poison will kill them.

A gentlemen picked up a church directory recently. He studied it closely. Then he laughed. Then he scoffed. "What's the matter?" we inquired. "Why, man," he said, "it looks like all the bad men I know have joined the church!" Then he named them—man after man whose standing was certainly not such as church-membership should guarantee; men who are immersed in money-making, as utterly of this world as men can be; men who lie in the listing of their taxes; men who are talked about for their sharp practice; men who are known to drink whiskey; men who will not pay their debts; men who do not attend church. Who wonders that a church like that defeats the power of God and the angels? Such a church only can do this. Nothing else is in just the strategic position to thwart God. The devil so strong nowhere else as he is when in the church. At this point he paralyzes the nerve-centre of Christianity.

This is not pleasant writing. The reader will ask, what is the matter? Some one will say that the writer is in a bad mood. Very well; if you can dismiss this matter so easily something is wrong with you. Men have become so accustomed to corruption that they cannot smell it. Look about you. How is it with your church? Is she a coward? Is she clean? Can she purge herself?

Is she saving her world? Is she a light to all around? Is God's power in her?

We believe profoundly that the churches of today so much need nothing as a general judgment; a general purging; a strong and severe course of discipline. And we hope and pray that the Baptist churches of North Carolina will set about this business with no delay. Let them not fear rich or poor, great or small; let them not consult flesh and blood; let them not halt before somebody's feelings or influence or contributions. Let them purge themselves if it reduces their strength to the vanishing point. A pure church of three members has more power than an unclean church of a thousand or a million. A pure church ridden with poverty and ready for the poor-house has more power than an impure church with a million or a billion dollars running after the world.

We hope that this year will be a year memorable for the cutting out of dead branches. If our hope shall come true, we promise that next shall be memorable for the visitations of the Spirit of God. Going into battle armies, since the day of Gideon, have rid themselves of the unfit. The armies of God will win no great battle until they shall have done likewise.

THE CHILD.

When Mary sang to him, I wonder if
His baby hand stole softly to her lips,
And, smiling down, she needs must stop her song
To kiss and kiss again his finger-tips.

I wonder if, his eyelids being shut,
And Mary bending mutely over him,
She felt her eyes, as mothers do today,
For very depth of love grow wet and dim.

Then did a sudden presage come to her
Of bitter looks and words and thorn-strewn
street?
And did she catch her breath and hide her face,
And shower smothered kisses on his feet?
—Bertha Gerneaux Woods, in Verses (Neale Pub. Company.)

AN EXPLANATION.

People hear patiently what it is understood they will not practice. But if the preacher "come down," as it is called from these heights, and assail in sober earnest, deep-rooted abuses, respectable vices, inhuman institutions or arrangements, and unjust means of gain, which interest, pride and habit make dear and next to universal, the people who exact from him official holiness are shocked, offended. "He forgets his sphere."—William Ellery Channing.