

APPLIED CHRISTIANITY

[Address Delivered By William Jennings Bryan Before the Ministerial Union of Baltimore, February 3rd, 1919.]

I appreciate the privilege of addressing the ministers of this great city at a time when every heart is impressed with the solemnity of the hour and with the responsibilities that rest upon the Christian church. I shall not indorse the indictment contained in a recent magazine article based upon the description given of Peter when he sat by the fire warming himself. On the contrary, I shall address you in the spirit of Dr. Marquis' defense of the ministry entitled "Peter, When He Was Warmed Up." I am glad to indorse what has just been said in regard to the activities of the Federal Council of Churches. It is, in my judgment, the greatest religious organization in our nation. It gives expression to the conscience of more than seventeen million members of the various Protestant churches; its possibilities for good are limitless; its responsibilities are commensurate with its opportunities.

The importance of co-operation in city, state, and nation, cannot be overestimated. If you tell me that one thousand men, acting together, can do a thousand times as much as one man, acting alone, I reply that the statement is entirely too conservative. A thousand men, acting together, may be able to do what ten thousand, one hundred thousand, or even a million, of men could do, acting alone, because they can do what the individual would not think of undertaking. If, before the Canal was dug at Panama, all the people in the world had walked single-file across the Isthmus, it would never have occurred to any one of them to undertake the Canal by himself, but, when forty thousand men united their energies in an organized effort, the greatest engineering feat in history was placed to the credit of the United States. You not only NEED co-operation but you cannot get along without it if you are to live up to the requirements of today.

But let me state the other side, for there is another side. Co-operation is only possible among those who desire the accomplishment of the same things; it must not be allowed to interfere with individual initiative. We cooperate for progress, but we must not permit concerted inaction. Co-operation does not come in the beginning of any movement because every movement starts with some one who will not wait for others to join with him. If the churches were to agree that no church would begin until all were ready, there would be no progress whatever, because the word of command would be given by the slowest instead of by the most progressive. I might illustrate it in this way: Suppose we decided to have all the people in the United States rise at the same time and begin work together. We would fasten San Francisco's time on the rest of the country and compel the people of the East to lie in bed until sun up at the Golden Gate. (If it were in politics, some would sleep until the sun rose in China.) That is not nature's way. WE RISE WHEN THE LIGHT REACHES US AND BEGIN THE WORK OF THE DAY.

So in reforms, no man can wait for another. He must get up when the light reaches him and he must awaken those about him if they still sleep. No church can wait for another church; no preacher can wait for another preacher, and no layman can wait for his pastor. When God tells a man to speak he cannot stop to count those who stand with him. He must speak even though he cries in the wilderness; he must stand up even if he has to stand alone. Let me illustrate. — We have just won a great, moral victory — the greatest of the generation. Would we have won it if the churches had come together and agreed that no church would support prohibition until they were all ready to support it? The Methodist church has, I think it is only fair to say, done more than any other church to win the fight for prohibition. It has probably contributed a larger number of active workers to the cause nationally than any other church. My own church, the Presbyterian, has given powerful aid — it was the first, I think, to enter the work in an organized way; the interest spread until nearly all the churches took part in the final charge against the liquor traffic.

Take another reform which is nearly here — Woman's Suffrage. The Methodist church was

probably the first large religious organization to indorse this reform. My own church did not indorse the national suffrage amendment until a year ago last May when the General Assembly met at Dallas, Texas. And some of the other churches have not indorsed it yet. Think of it! "Woman, the last to leave the Cross and the first to reach the tomb," as someone has beautifully expressed it, and still woman's right to a voice in politics has not yet been demanded by some of our church organizations, although more than two-thirds of the House of Representatives at Washington have declared for Woman Suffrage and a considerable more than one-half of the Senate favor it. Think of it! Churches still silent while distillers, brewers, and liquor dealers vote — not only vote but tie the hands of the mother while they rob her home of her children. It is fortunate that Woman's Suffrage did not have to wait until ALL the churches joined in demanding it. And so with other reforms.

I come today to impress upon you the importance of prompt, INDIVIDUAL response to the call for service, and I shall rest my plea upon the words of Christ. If you will turn to the closing verses of the last chapter of Matthew you will find the first thought for which I ask your consideration. Here are the words which I would burn into your hearts. Jesus, after he rose from the dead, gave his final appeal to his disciples: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations" — ALL nations. Christ's gospel is an universal gospel; it is intended for EVERY human being. But it is more than an universal gospel. He continued, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" — not a part of his teachings but ALL of his teachings to ALL men, and then His promise, "Lo, I am with you ALWAYS even unto the END OF THE WORLD." A UNIVERSAL gospel — an ETERNAL creed — not for a few but for everyone; not for a day but always.

One of the popular songs brought out by the war is entitled: "Freedom, for all, forever." It is a taking phrase. And what is our political slogan? "Democracy, for all, forever." We cannot better describe our religious purpose than by the use of a similar phrase, "Christ, for all, forever." If Christianity is worth anything at all to us it must be the last word in religion. Nothing is to come after it, and there is no part of the world to which it does not apply.

That, ministers of Baltimore, is the kind of religion that you profess — that is the religion of which you are the spiritual custodians. Not one of you has more faith in this gospel than I have; not one of you trusts it more fully as the only solution of all our problems.

And what is back of this religion? Here, again, I appeal to the Word and to the part of it from which I have already drawn. Jesus left nothing to be said; he covered the entire ground; he not only proclaimed a gospel that was to be preached to all, everywhere and forever, but he declared that ALL power was back of it — "All power is given unto me in Heaven and on earth." The statement could not be broader; it could not be stronger. Ministers, can you doubt the triumph of the religion which you profess, when it has such an indorsement as the Author of that religion gives it? But how can Christ's plan be carried out? We are not left in doubt. His statements are just as clear on this subject as when He speaks of the breadth, the depth, the power, and the permanence of His moral code.

You will find in the 22nd chapter of the gospel by Matthew that Christ answered a question put to him by a lawyer. It is the business of lawyers to ask questions and they sometimes get more information than they desire. I would not reflect upon the lawyer. My father was a lawyer and no better man ever lived. I was trained for the law and practiced until I was drawn away from the law into politics. And my only son is a lawyer, so that I am thrice compelled to treat the profession with respect. But it is not necessary that I should respect all lawyers. But even a question asked with an improper motive may bring out a truth; Christ answered the question by putting the seal of his approval on the first commandment. It was the first commandment so amplified as to include all of the four commandments that relate to man's duty to God. Christ answered,

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." If one obeys the commandment in the form in which Christ puts it he cannot be disobedient to any of the commandments of which it is composed. First, one must be brought into harmony with God and then he is ready to understand and obey the second commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Christ does not say that one shall not love himself. On the contrary, the love of self is implied in the commandment. If one does not love himself it would be no advantage to his neighbor to love him AS he loves himself. It is because a man is presumed to love himself that his love for himself is made the measure of his love for his neighbor. Every human being is entrusted not only with the care of himself but also with the desire to protect himself; the best that can be asked of him is that he shall love his neighbor as he loves himself.

Love of one's neighbor is the only visible proof that can be given of love of God. Praise of God and prayers to God cannot convince, because we hear but one side of the conversation. We are much more interested in knowing God's opinion of a man than we are in knowing the man's opinion of God, and we cannot understand what God's opinion of a man is except as we see him translate his love of God into service to man. Love of neighbor, therefore, is not only a proof, but the only proof that man can furnish to those about him, of his love of God.

I am not a preacher; when I was a college boy the wife of my pastor invited me to come to her house one evening that she might lay before me a plea in behalf of the ministry. I accepted her invitation and was present at the hour appointed, but the sickness of a relative had called her away from home and I never had the benefit of the argument which she intended to make. But, if I were a minister, I would not be at loss for a text. I think my first sermon would be built upon the verse which says: "If a man says he loves God and hates his brother he is a liar." I would not use language quite so harsh if I were framing the indictment, but I have no right to change the language of the Bible, and I have no disposition to do so. My text would be short but my sermon would be long if I tried to tell how many liars there are. Not only do we have this question raised as to the veracity of the man who proclaims his love of God and yet hates his brother, but we have proof that it is impossible, for it is asked, "How can a man love God whom he hath not seen if he loves not his brother whom he hath seen?"

Now we come, my ministerial friends, to the application of Christianity and this is not only the important part of your work, but it is the difficult part, aye, it may be the dangerous part. It is no easy task to denounce wrong from the pulpit. If you think it is, read the experience of Elijah. He brought accusations against Ahab and he not only angered Ahab but he stirred up Jezebel; and Jezebel did not hesitate to use all the influence she had against him. The Bible tells us that he fled from her presence. Are there not Naboths today and have they not vineyards which are coveted? And are there not Ahabs in high places? Are there not even Jezebels? You may have to flee; you may even rest discouraged "under a juniper tree" but God will encourage you, as he encouraged Elijah, by telling you that there are thousands "who have not yet bowed the knee to Baal." You must not doubt the existence of these loyal people even though they have not made themselves known.

Can you be less willing to make sacrifices for the right than those of the rank and file? I have known men to make sacrifices in politics; I have known men who faced bankruptcy rather than surrender their citizenship — men who are willing to lose employment and go out in search of work — rather than cast their vote against their convictions. Can you be less courageous, you who believe in the power of God and have taken your oaths at His altar? Have you any doubt that every righteous cause will triumph, and that God's arm is strong enough to bring victory to his side?

My father did not leave me much money and I am glad he did not. A fortune in prospect has ruined more young men than it has ever helped, and I am not vain enough to assume that I was strong enough to resist the temptations that have ruined so many. He gave me a piece of advice, however, that has been worth much more to me than any fortune could have