

EDITORIALS

Living From Principle

Does it pay?

This question is a very familiar one. It is asked with a view to a possible course of action upon which must be determined; and the answer to that question is to determine the decision. If anything pays, in dollars and cents or in some other temporal, material way, we will devote ourselves to its accomplishment, if it does not pay we have no interest in it. And in this direct form or in some more indirect way one may often hear the question applied to various spheres of life and departments of activity, personal, social, economical and political. The determining question is not whether anything is true or right, whether it is in harmony with the Word and will of God, but merely whether it will yield some carnal benefit. And gradually, if anything only pays, it also will be considered right, though it be principally wrong.

This attitude toward life, toward our walk in the midst of the world, is fundamentally wrong because it is carnal.

To be sure, in the true sense of the word, truth and righteousness do pay; there is in the keeping of God's precepts a great reward. But for this true reward the man that always asks whether anything does pay and allows his course of action to be determined by the answer to that question has no eye. His eye is carnal. And the desire after the things of the world, apart from God, motivates all he does.

Similar in character is the rather pragmatic question: does it work?

Also this question is frequently asked in order to furnish a basis for a certain action. Whether or not any proposed action or course of action is principally right or wrong, is in harmony with the will of God or contrary to it, is a question that is of minor importance, that may, at least, be eliminated from our deliberations as to what shall be done and in what direction we shall turn. Let us try it out anyway, whether it appears to be right or wrong! This is the slogan. If it works we have gained an advantage; if it fails, there is not much lost and we simply map out a different course.

It is the utility attitude.

They that assume this attitude to life are ready to forsake and sacrifice any principle for a program of their own, if it only "works".

It has this in common with the "does-it-pay-attitude" that, like it, it is carnal.

For, of course, it can never work to depart from the

way of God's Word and precepts. That way is the sure way to destruction.

But in the mind and heart of him that asks this latter question this ultimate end of the way of man has no place. He seeks carnal things. The intent of his question is merely as to whether what he tries will work in a carnal, sinful, this-worldly way.

Yet, from the motive revealed in questions such as these the "world" lives, and the Christian often is deceived and follows the world in this regard.

It was really the motive behind the prohibition movement of still recent date in our country. One might oppose the movement for principal reasons, might urge that it does not belong to the domain of the "state" to prescribe what we shall eat and drink; might argue that sin is not in what a man eats and what he drinks, but in the heart. The answer was always; but it will surely pay! It will work! It will improve social and economic conditions! And at any rate, it is worth while trying. Let us see whether it will work!

In the same way of reasoning the laws of our country departed from the clear revelation of the will of God with respect to the marriage relation. True, the marriage-relation is inviolable. It is the union of one man and one woman exclusively for life. Only adultery may be ground for divorce according to the ordinance of God. But this principle does not work! There are too many conditions in which it works far better to let down the bars, to open the way for married couples that are "unequally matched" and "unhappily married" to shake off the marriage yoke that is become too heavy. And the result is that divorces are granted for almost every conceivable reason.

And it works. . . . to the sure destruction of the very foundation of society!

The same is true of many other movements, woman suffrage and emancipation, birth-control and the like.

But over against this the only correct stand of the Christian is to adhere to principle and never depart from it, regardless of the question whether it pays and works or not; rather trusting that this will surely work and always must pay!

Principles, real principles, not imaginations of our own heart, are eternal, inviolable verities, not determined by man, by society, by the state, by conditions or circumstances, but by the Most High God Himself.

They cannot be changed.

They cannot be violated or forsaken with impunity.

And they are fundamental.

The word "principle" really signifies beginning. It is a beginning, not in a merely temporal or local sense, not in the sense in which the dawn is the beginning of day or the first word is the beginning of a book; but in the causal sense. Just as an acorn is the beginning of the oak; or as the seed sown is the begin-

ning of the wheat harvest, or as the source on the snow-peaked mountain is the beginning of a river, so principles are "beginnings".

Thus there are principles of truth, basic truths, eternal verities, from which springs the whole system of truth with necessity, and to depart from which even in the least, results in ultimate distortion of the whole structure of truth. In that sense we speak of Reformed principles, those basic truths upon which the entire superstructure of our Reformed confession is built and depends. That God is God and is absolutely sovereign, that He made all things by the act of His omnipotent will for His own Name's sake, that the natural man is totally depraved and wholly incapable of doing any good, that salvation is wholly of the Lord, that He sovereignly ordained His own to eternal glory and reprobated others with equal sovereignty, that Christ died for the elect only, we are saved not by or because of our own will, but by free and sovereign grace,—these are fundamental truths, principles from which one cannot depart, without denying all the rest of Reformed truth. Neither can one deny any one of these principles without placing himself in a position in which he must also deny the others.

Thus there are principles, objective, fundamental, eternal verities for our whole life. Ordinances of God they are for our personal life and for every relationship in life, in home and society, in church and state; ordinances for the life of our body and of our soul, for our thinking and willing, for the relation of man and wife, of parent and child, of magistrate and subject, of employer and employee, of officebearer and member, of church and church in the same denomination, of man in relation to the world about him, to his goods and possessions, his name and position in the world. And also from these man cannot depart with impunity. No matter how desirable his own, sinfully conceived course of action may appear to him, no matter how strongly it may appear as if things will never "work" on the basis of these principles, while they would seem to prosper in the direction of his own way, to depart from these eternal principles means certain destruction! It means destruction of the body and of the soul, of the home and of society, of the church and state, of the world!

What, then, is a man of principle?

He is certainly not the man that separates principle and practice. He may be thoroughly versed in the principles of the truth and in the basic verities that must dominate our life and walk. He may talk much of them and be very able to defend them; but his life testifies against him, for in actual life he departs from what he knows and professes to be the truth. He is the intellectualist, the theorist, that has a head full of principles, but in his walk will not touch them with his finger. He is not a man of principle, because

for him principles are not vital forces that impel him on to a certain course of action.

Nor is he a man of principle that is always active without ever stopping to consider whether or not his course leads in the direction of God's will and is in harmony with God's eternal verities. He is the practicalist, the pragmatist, the man that merely looks at results as he desires to obtain them, the man that asks whether it pays or whether it will work. He changes his course according to circumstances, regardless of the question of principle; he turns about with every wind of doctrine; he is motivated by the "bread-question"; he wants to save his life by all means. And he shall surely lose it.

But a man of principle is, first of all, he, whose heart has been liberated from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life, freed from the dominion of the devil and subjected to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is he, to be more specific, in whose heart God engraved by the power of His grace the eternal principles of His Word and law, so that they have become vital forces within him, motivating him in all his life and walk. It is he, moreover, who also has a clear and full understanding of the Word of God, as revealed to us in the Scriptures. It is he, that has "discernment", true wisdom from above, to be able to apply these principles of the Word of God to every walk and department of life. And it is he, finally, who thus knowing God's eternal verities and carrying them in his heart and having thus determined upon a certain course of action, will never be swayed or influenced by conditions, by circumstances, by promises or threats on the part of the world, but will adhere to the course determined by principle, regardless of possible or actual results!

And that man is blessed!

It may not appear so in this world.

Often, indeed, it may appear as if it were more expedient to depart from principle and follow the way of our own imaginations.

Even for the Church of Christ it may seem advisable sometimes to compromise in this respect. To adhere to principle may cost her many members, means and power in the world.

But in spite of appearances the fact remains that only he will be blessed that never forsakes principle.

For, blessing is not in things, but in the favor of God. And God's favor is upon His people, as they walk in His way and keep His precepts.

And we look for the eternal reward, the things that are not seen, that can never be taken from us!

The utility man, that will save his life, shall surely lose it; but he that will lose his life for Christ's sake, shall save it without fail!