

Standard of Practical Christianity

Adin Ballou

1839

Humbly desirous of promoting Christian piety and morality in their primitive purity, the undersigned do solemnly acknowledge the Principles, Sentiments, and Duties declared in the following Standard, viz.:

We are Christians. Our creed is the New Testament. Our religion is love. Our only law is the will of God. Our grand object is the restoration of man, especially the most fallen and friendless. Our immediate concern is the promotion of useful knowledge, moral improvement, and Christian perfection. We recognize no Spiritual Father but God; no master but Christ. We belong to that kingdom of "righteousness, peace, and joy" which is "not of this world"; whose throne is holiness, whose scepter is truth, whose greatness is humility, whose preeminence is service, whose patriotism is love of enemies, whose heroism is forbearance, whose glory is self-sacrifice, whose wealth is charity, whose triumphs are salvation. Therefore, we can make no earthly object our chief good, nor be governed by any motive but the love of Right, nor compromise duty with worldly convenience, nor seek the preservation of our property, our reputation, our personal liberty, or our life, by the sacrifice of Conscience. We cannot live merely to eat, drink, sleep, gratify our sensual appetites, dress, display ourselves, acquire property, and be accounted great in this world; but to do good.

All that we are and have, with all that God shall ever bestow upon us, we unreservedly dedicate to the cause of universal righteousness, expecting for ourselves in the order of divine providence only a comfortable subsistence until death, and in the world to come eternal life.

Placing unlimited confidence in our Heavenly Father, we distrust all other guidance. We cannot be governed by the will of man, however solemnly and formally declared, nor put our trust in an arm of flesh. Hence we voluntarily withdraw from all interference with the governments of this world. We can take no part in the politics, the administration, or the defense of those governments, either by voting at their polls, holding their offices, aiding in the execution of their legal vengeance, fighting under their banners, claiming their protection against violence, seeking redress in their courts, petitioning their legislatures to enact laws, or obeying their unrighteous requirements. Neither can we participate in any rebellion, insurrection, sedition, riot, conspiracy, or plot against any of these governments, nor resist any of their ordinances by physical force, nor do anything unbecoming a peaceable submission to the existing powers; but will quietly pay the taxes levied upon us, conform to all innocent laws and usages, enjoy all righteous privileges, ab-

stain from all civil commotions, freely express our opinions of governmental acts, and patiently endure whatever penalties we may for conscience' sake incur.

We cannot employ carnal weapons nor any physical violence whatsoever to compel moral agents to do right, or to prevent their doing wrong — not even for the preservation of our lives. We cannot render evil for evil, railing for railing, wrath for wrath, nor revenge insults and injuries, nor lay up grudges, nor be overcome of evil, nor do otherwise than “love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us.”

We cannot indulge the lust of dominion, nor exercise arbitrary authority, nor cherish bigotry, nor be egotistical, nor receive honorary titles, nor accept flattery, nor seek human applause, nor assume the place of dignity. We cannot be pharisaical, self-righteous, nor dogmatical. We cannot do evil that good may come. We cannot resent reproof, nor justify our faults, nor persist in wrongdoing.

We cannot excommunicate, anathematize, or execrate an apostate, heretic, or reprobate person otherwise than withdrawing our fellowship, refusing our confidence, and declining familiar intercourse.

We cannot be cruel, even to the beasts of the earth. We cannot be inhuman, unmerciful, unjust, unkind, abusive, or injurious to any being of our race. We cannot be indifferent to the sufferings of distressed humanity, nor treat the unfortunate with contempt. But we hold ourselves bound to do good, as we have opportunity, unto all mankind; to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, minister to the sick, visit the imprisoned, entertain the stranger, protect the helpless, comfort the afflicted, plead for the oppressed, seek the lost, lift up the fallen, rescue the ensnared, reclaim the wandering, reform the vicious, enlighten the benighted, instruct the young, admonish the wayward, rebuke the scornful, encourage the penitent, confirm the upright, and diffuse a universal charity.

We cannot go with a multitude to do evil, nor take part with the mighty against the feeble, nor excite enmity between the rich and the poor, nor stand aloof from the friendless, nor abandon them that take refuge with us, nor court the great, nor despise the small, nor be afraid of the terrible, nor take advantage of the timid, nor show respect of persons, nor side with a friend in what is wrong, nor oppose an enemy in what is right, nor forbid others to do good because they follow not us, nor set up names and forms above personal holiness, nor refuse to cooperate with any man, class, or association of men on our own principles in favor of righteousness, nor condemn any new light, improvement, excellence, which may be commended to our attention from any direction whatsoever.

We cannot make a trade or emolument of preaching the gospel, nor be supported therein by unwilling contributions, nor keep back any truth thereof which ought to be declared, nor consent to preach anything more or less than God directs us, nor encourage religious devotion in mere worldly show, nor pursue any course of conduct whereby the money, the smiles, or the frowns of corrupt men may overrule the divine law and testimony. We cannot surrender the right of serving God according to the dictates of our own conscience, nor interfere with others in their exercise of the same liberty.

We hold it impossible to cherish a holy love for mankind without abhorring sin. Therefore, we can give no countenance, express or implied, to any iniquity, vice, wrong, or evil, on the ground that the same is established by law, or is a source of pecuniary profit to any class of men, or is fashionable in high life, or is popular with the multitude; but we hold ourselves bound so much

the more to testify plainly, faithfully, and fearlessly against such sins. Hence, we declare our utter abhorrence of war, slavery, intemperance, licentiousness, covetousness, and worldly ambitions in all their forms. We cannot partake in these sins nor apologize for them, nor remain neutral concerning them, nor refrain from rebuking their various manifestations; but must forever abstain from and oppose them.

We cannot promote our own advantage at the expense of others by deceiving, defrauding, corrupting, degrading, overbearing, or impoverishing them. We cannot take away their good name by defamation, nor by retailing the scandal of their enemies, nor by spreading abroad evil reports on mere hearsay authority, nor by wantonly publishing their failings. We cannot be busybodies in other people's affairs, nor tale-bearers of domestic privacy, nor proclaimers of matters unsuitable for the public ear. We cannot rashly judge men's motives, nor raise evil suspicions against them, nor join in condemning the accused without a hearing, nor delay reparation to the injured, nor make any one's necessity our advantage, nor willingly render ourselves burdensome to others, nor cause any one a single unnecessary step for our mere gratification; but we will always deem it "more blessed to give than to receive," to serve than to be served — sacrificing nothing of holy principle, though, if need be, everything of personal convenience.

We cannot live in idleness, nor be careless or extravagant, nor on the other hand avaricious, parsimonious, or niggardly. We cannot indulge a feverish anxiety in any of our temporal concerns, nor fret ourselves under disappointment, nor repine at anything that marks our lot. We cannot be austere, morose, or rude; nor capricious, ungrateful, or treacherous. We cannot practice dissimulation, nor offer fulsome compliments, nor use a flattering courtesy. We cannot follow pernicious fashions, nor encourage theatrical exhibitions, nor join in frivolous amusements, nor countenance games of chance, nor array ourselves in costly apparel, nor wear useless ornaments, nor put on badges of mourning, nor distinguish ourselves by any peculiar formalities of raiment or language.

We cannot indulge to excess in eating, drinking, sleeping, recreation, labor, study, joy, or sorrow, nor permit our passions to tyrannize over our reason. We cannot harbor pride, envy, anger, malice, wrath, ill-will, sullenness, or peevishness; nor cherish any unholy lusts, imaginations, or tempers.

We cannot swear by any matter of oath, nor make any rash vows, nor offer any extraordinary protestations of our innocence, sincerity, or veracity; nor utter any blasphemy, imprecation, falsehood, obscene expression, foolish jest, or profane exclamation.

We cannot enter into the state of matrimony without grave deliberation and an assurance of divine approbation. We cannot neglect or abuse our families, nor evince any want of natural affection towards our bosom companion, our aged parents, or our helpless offspring. We cannot imbrute our children by disregarding their education, nor by setting them an evil example, nor by over-fondness, nor by harshness and severity, nor by corporeal punishment, nor by petulance and scolding.

We cannot neglect our brethren in their adversity, nor call anything our own when their necessities demand relief, nor be silent when they are unjustly accused or reproached. We cannot speak of their faults in their absence without first having conferred with and admonished them; nor then if they have promised amendment.

We cannot over-urge any person to unite with us, nor resort to undignified artifices of proselytism, nor seek debate with unreasonable men, nor protract a controversy for the sake of the last word, nor introduce sacred subjects for discussion in a company of scorners. Yet we will hold

ourselves ready to give an answer to every one that asketh of us a reason for our faith, opinion, or conduct, with meekness, frankness, and patience.

Finally, as disciples of Jesus Christ, before whose judgment seat all must appear, we acknowledge ourselves bound by the most sublime, solemn, and indispensable obligations to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, in all possible respects; and whereinsoever we come short thereof to take shame to ourselves, confess our sins, seek divine pardon, repair to the utmost our delinquencies, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. And for all this, our sufficiency is of God, to whom be glory, world without end. Amen.

Adin Ballou, David R. Lamson, Daniel S. Whitney, Wm. H. Fish, *Ministers*.

Charles Gladding, Wm. W. Cook, *Laymen Concurring*.

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