

THE PASTOR'S MESSAGE

SPIRITUAL EQUILIBRIUM

By H. C. Mullen*

"Thou that abhorrest Idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?"—Rom. 2:22.

"Hear now O House of Israel, is not My Way Equal?"—Ezek. 18:25.

One of the Glories of the Deity is the equality of His divine attributes. His love is equal to His justice, His mercy is equal to His wrath. He is equal in all His attributes. This being true, there can be no question but what God desires and takes infinite delight in beholding moral equality in His followers.

Does He always find it? It is to be feared that He does not! That the Bible holds out such a possibility for us cannot be doubted. A perfect moral state must be a perfectly balanced state. Perhaps there is no greater problem in all our Christian walk than that of keeping our spiritual balance. Human nature is very fickle. It will swing from one extreme to another. Like the pendulum of a clock, when given an impulse from one side it will swing beyond normal, to the other side. Church history has shown this. The Church has either drifted toward dead formalism or toward fanaticism. We notice the same in both religion and human nature.

Nature plays some strange pranks. There seems to be no hill without a corresponding valley. No person seems to be endowed with equal faculties. It is ever true that "one man's meat is another man's poison." This failing or tendency is altogether too liable to be carried over into religious experience. Much grief and misunderstanding among brethren, and dissension and splits in the church body, have arisen out of this human frailty. How zealously then should we seek for a balanced experience in all the graces of the Spirit.

Someone has made the remark that we are all insane in spots. Observation will almost make us believe this. Some geniuses had a form of insanity. People are not as a rule well balanced. Where there is the convex there is the concave, and this tendency seeks to show itself in our religion.

It is said of T. B. MacCauley, the great English writer and historian, that while he had a marvellous mind for things literary, he detested mathematics. His memory was so keen that he could have restored all of John Milton's works from memory. When he travelled about the country visiting libraries and universities compiling data for his famous history of England, he carried no note book but depended upon his memory only, to recall dates and facts, and yet he was a complete failure in mathematics.

It has also been observed, with much evidence to verify it, that every person who has some very outstanding conviction, or takes a very radical position on some point in religion, is certain to have a corresponding weakness on some other point. This is startlingly true. Observe it and you will see. This rule scarcely ever fails when you get to know the subject intimately. It is so very true that it will humble the best of us and will make us careful when we begin to contend fiercely for some phase of doctrine or practice. We have all seen people who were strong on some line but just as weak on some other. We see this well illustrated in the Gos-

pels. Jesus met it in the Pharisees and denounced it. They would, indeed, tithe the few little herbs gathered at the roadside, but could omit love to God and man. They severely reprov'd Jesus and His disciples because they rubbed the husks off some grain with their hands so they could eat it to appease their hunger.

The exacting Pharisees called this threshing on the Sabbath Day, but they did not think about the matter of having murder in their hearts against Jesus, and a hatred that nothing less would satisfy than to see Jesus nailed to the cross. They denounced Jesus because he failed to wash his hands before he ate but they took no cognizance of fact that their hearts were full of uncleanness.

This from a recent book is very much to the point: "The younger son (prodigal) sinned low down in his flesh, in his lusts and appetites. The elder brother sinned high up in his disposition, in his bad temper, in his lack of love, in his smallness of soul, in his unwillingness to co-operate and forgive. Now, the sins of the flesh are despised by us. They are not respectable. But the sins of the disposition are sometimes highly respectable. If a man commits adultery, sins in his flesh, we have a church council and we put him out. But if he sins in his disposition—if he is bad-tempered and selfish, we have a church council and we make him a member! And yet it is quite probable that the sins of the disposition do as much harm to the kingdom of God as the sins of flesh. Perhaps more! Bad-tempered, touchy and quarrelsome religious people do as much harm to the Kingdom of God as drunkards and other kinds of sinners."

How extremely inconsistent is human nature! How we all need the sanctifying fire, and a lot of good common sense to keep us in the middle of the road!

This tendency in man has also shown itself in doctrinal positions. Every great doctrine has its corresponding error as truly as every experience of grace has its corresponding peril. Mankind has been prone to be eccentric in doctrine as well as in practice.

The cardinal doctrine, "Justification by Faith," has been perverted into "eternal security." Soon after the revival of the truth of justification by faith alone, under Martin Luther, there arose what is known in church history as Antinomianism. The word is derived from the Greek, "anti," against, and "nomos," law. The teaching was that once a man had faith, he was free from all further obligation to the law. No matter what sin he committed, he was still a child of God. We have the same error revamped and under various names with us today.

The glorious truth of "Heart Holiness" or "Christian Perfection," can lapse into dry legalism, or run to fanaticism. People may become so rigid in keeping the law that they lose the joy and freedom of the Holy Ghost. This is a dangerous pitfall, and one from which it is extremely hard to recover people. It is a state harder to confess than outbreaking sin. A striking translation of the first text reads as follows: "You then who teach your fellow man, do you refuse to teach yourself? You who cry out against stealing, are you yourself a thief? You who forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You who loath idols, do you plunder their temples?"

Some people are very conscientious in keeping the Lord's day. They would be condemned to shave or shine their shoes on

Sunday, but when earning twenty-five dollars a week clear of expenses can go to church and with a pious look put ten cents on the plate and seem to have no conscience about it. Another who would shave on Sunday, or black his shoes, feels that in no case would the Lord be pleased with less than a tenth of his actual gain for the week, and he would wonder deeply how the other fellow could keep blessed and be so tight. Situations like this make perfect fellowship in the church a difficult matter, hence another argument for an evenly balanced life.

A preacher very severe on costly or immodest attire can be so slack on paying his debts as to be threatened with law. A preacher full of dynamite against anything savouring of immorality comes back with fire and a nasty spirit at another brother, whom he thinks has been favored a bit at his expense. A preacher holding a standard sky high is peeved and shows it, because he is not put on to preach at the time he would choose, at a convention of ministers. A person gets glum and sulks and refuses to work, and becomes a dead weight on the church, because something does not go to please him, when on some other lines he is extremely exacting as to how others behave.

Some Christian is caught by circumstances in a predicament that puts him in a bad light for which he is very sorry and penitent. Another in the church professing perfect love and holding a very high standard in regard to anything that appears to be a compromise of truth, can take up the cudgel against the unfortunate brother or sister, and tattle the matter everywhere, and seek to destroy the good name and influence of the other party. In cases like the above, the sin committed by the party who is offended and flies off on another tangent, is usually worse than the offence in the first place, and does more harm to the cause of God. We have all observed individuals sitting under straight Bible preaching. While the discourse was on one line there would be loud amens and plenty shouting, but when the theme was changed and the gospel wheel turned around to the right number, the number that exposed the Jacob, the weakness, of the listener, suddenly "the shouting and the tumult dies" and there is silence in that quarter. It would be highly amusing if not so tragic. Of course some people are determined enough to shout it through when they cannot line up to it, and have no intentions to do so, because if they ceased to respond, it would put them in a bad light.

It is true too that some will say amen to the truth even when it cuts them off, but they mean to walk in the light and profit by it. It seems hard to obtain absolute collective uniformity in relation to any covenant or set of rules because people differ so much in tastes and habits and besetments. This is so true that it becomes doubtful whether we have a right to draw up a set of rules and make them a test of church membership. These differing convictions afford a great opportunity to practice charity and it may be best to have rules, but under all circumstances, and in all things, everyone should seek a fully rounded experience, and live in the place where the balance of truth shows no light side. Fellow Christians, will your life and experience balance?

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