

The King's Highway

Rev. L. K. Miller, No. 61

AN ADVOCATE OF SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS

VOL. XXXVIII

MONCTON, N. B., MARCH 15, 1961

No. 506

Intolerance At Its Best

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"Except ye repent ..." "Except a man be born again ..." "Except ye abide in me ..." "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die ..." (Luke 13:3; John 3:3; 15:4; 12:4).

Dr. Henry Link, whose book *My Return to Religion* was on the "best seller" lists a few years ago, wrote a later book entitled *The Rediscovery of Morals*. To the last chapter of this volume Dr. Link gave the title, "A Plea for Religious Intolerance."

"Tolerance and broadmindedness," he points out, have been "the shibboleth of our intellectual age. The result is that we have almost lost our sense of right and wrong—that we are now drifting in a chaotic world without compass, sextant, or map."

Now it just happens that all of us are narrow-minded and intolerant in certain respects ... A chemical laboratory is usually a pretty modern sort of place. It may be the hangout of persons who boast of their broadmindedness in the realm of morals. Nothing, they say, is really fixed. Everything is relative. But in that laboratory the chemical composition of a thing as common as water is so fixed that exactly two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen give you water, and if you have another combination you get something other than water. It may be silly to be so narrowminded about it, but there it is.

So it turns out that tolerance is not to be praised indiscriminately. There is a tolerance that is as fatal as it is foolish.

In this business of living there are rules of the game. You and I did not make them. We may not like them. But there they are!

In this matter of being Christians there are truths that are central and crucial. They aren't manmade; they are Christ-made. We may not conform to them—may indeed rebel against them. But there they are!

When Jesus talked about these truths, He talked dogmatically, authoritatively, with finality.

Here is one of them: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). On this point of right thinking about sin Jesus was intolerant.

I say "right thinking" because that is what repentance really means. The Greek word for repent means literally "change your mind."

Try not to confuse repentance with remorse. People get caught in the unhappy consequences of their sins, and they begin moaning over their fate. Remorse can be a highly emotional form of self-pity—just feeling sorry for yourself. Not so repentance!

Repentance, with or without tears, begins when we see our wrong selves and our wrong doing as a form of rebellion against the way life is supposed to be lived. It is a mood of humility in which we see that our sin is a slap

in God's face and a defiance of His Kingdom. And we never see this more clearly than we do at the Cross of Jesus Christ, where all the wounds we have inflicted upon God come to light in His suffering love for us in the mind and body of His Son.

A few years ago there was a scandal that broke over some of the leading athletes in Sweden, who were charged with taking money for some of their activities and thereby violating their standing as amateurs. Among these was Gunder Haegg, the world-famous track star. In his first reaction to the charges Haegg wrote a letter to the Swedish Athletic Association denying any guilt. Later he changed his mind, wrote a second letter, and acknowledged his violation of the rules. To a reporter for one of the Stockholm newspapers he said: "Since I sent that letter to the Swedish Athletic Association, I have given the affair more thought and concluded that the letter was a bit badly thought out."

In quoting those words I make no pretense of judging Gunder Haegg, whether his repentance was real or otherwise, but I would remind us all that when he speaks of a change of mind about wrong doing, a sizing up of failure in a new and more honest light, he is moving into the realm of that repentance without which, says Jesus, there is no way for a man to be right with God.

A lot of us are frightfully slow in coming to the point. We've got to see that all our efforts to justify ourselves before God are, to use Gunder Haegg's expression, "badly thought out." We've got to see what the Psalmist saw when he cried in clear-eyed confession to God, "In thy sight shall no living man be justified" (Psa. 143:2).

In modern poetry I know of few things that drive home the meaning of repentance more penetratingly and powerfully than Dora Greenwell's lines:

"You'd tell me, for aught that you've ever seen, I'm not worse than other men.

I've nothing to do with better or worse, I haven't to judge for the rest;

If other men are not better than me, they're bad enough at the best.

Why, what have I done, perhaps you'll say, that should make me fret and grieve?

I didn't wrangle, or curse, or swear, I didn't lie or thieve; I'm clear of cheating, and drinking, and debt: well, perhaps, but I cannot say;

For some of these things I hadn't a mind, and some didn't come in my way.

"And there's many a thing I could wish undone, though the law might not be broke,

And there's many a word, now I come to think, that I could wish unspoken.

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