

Intolerance At Its Best

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I did what I thought would be the best; and I said just what came to my mind; I wasn't so honest that I need boast; and I'm sure that I wasn't kind.

"And we'll come to the things that I left undone, and then there'll be more to say; And we'll ask for the broken hearts that I cheered, and the tears that I wiped away; I thought of myself, and wrought for myself—for myself and for none beside, Just as if Jesus had never lived, and as if He had never died."

That's the mood of repentance! And there's no other way into the Kingdom of God! Even a child feels it, though he could never express it in Dora Greenwell's way. Jesus Christ shuts us up to the stark alternative: repent or perish! It's the inescapable intolerance of truth.

II.

Take another example of intolerance at its best: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Jesus, you see, is rigid and insistent on that point. The new birth is not merely the preferred way into the Kingdom, it is the prescribed way.

New birth means new life! New life, in the Christian sense, means sonship and citizenship. It means sonship—that is, the Holy Spirit imparts to my spirit a quality of life that makes me a member of God's family. I am already a member of His creation, but His family consists of those who possess the characteristics of children—love, growth, loyalty, service.

"When the fulness of the time was come," cries St. Paul to the Galatians, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5).

Closely related to this sonship is citizenship. New birth, as Jesus uses the figure, speaks not only of God's family but also of God's kingdom. My new birth spells a new relationship—I'm in the family. It spells also a new rule—I'm in the kingdom.

Why is all of this so tremendously important? Is it because preachers have a certain theological patter and chatter that they feel they have to keep up? Is it because churches have arbitrarily decided that this is the way to make Christians? Far from it!

It is because you and I were made for sonship in God's family and citizenship in His Kingdom. Love and growth and service, surrender and loyalty and courage, righteousness and peace and joy—these things give life its strength and its song.

But look at their opposites. Hate, frustration, and selfishness, self-will, cowardice, and compromise, impurity, conflict and despair—these break life down, shatter it, destroy it.

After seeing what it does to people, physically as well as spiritually, to live the non-Christian way, a professor in one of our medical schools declared not long ago: "You are absolutely right about this need for conversion; for if you religious people cannot produce it, then we medical people will have to; for life demands it."

Right! Only what Christ gives is Himself as the source and channel of the new life we need, and no medical society will ever be able to furnish a substitute for that. It is a "must." "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The King's Highway

III.

Consider a third illustration of intolerance at its best: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (John 15:4). Let me give you this sentence in the Phillips' translation: "For just as the branch cannot bear any fruit unless it shares the life of the vine, so you can produce nothing unless you go on growing in Me."

That's dogmatic teaching. It's intolerant. Yet Christ makes no apologies for it. He lays it down flatly: if you are going to be a useful, productive Christian, you simply must be a Christian going on and growing up. If you are stale and stagnant, you are fruitless.

When Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was eighty-five, he was still producing new poetry. Someone asked him how he did it. Looking out the window, he called attention to an apple tree in blossom. "Do you see that apple tree?" he asked. "Well, it is about forty years old and I've never seen lovelier blossoms than this year. The reason is the new wood that grew this spring, for the blossoms and the fruit are always produced on the new wood; and I, too, try to grow new wood each year. That is where my poems come from."

Poems are not the only products which depend upon fresh growth. So does the fruit of love, so does a better and finer use of the Bible, so does a more vigorous and powerful prayerlife, so does the ardor and fire of the Christian's passion to win others to the Saviour he serves.

When Dwight L. Moody was converted in Boston, he was a clerk in a shoe store. He had almost no education and little money. But he began to work for Christ without waiting for big opportunities or fine training. Since pews were rented in the church he attended, he paid for a whole pew. Then he went out and rounded up persons to fill it. These recruits were from the ranks of the unwashed who never went to church. When more people came than could get in that pew, he rented another, and repeated the process. It was a Presbyterian Church, one of whose elders one day told young Moody it would be best if he did not attempt to speak in public because he had so little education. Moody was not rude but he was frank. "I know my English is rather defective," he replied, "and I'm trying to improve. However, you use good English; what are you doing with it?" The elder was convicted by the answer.

There are stale saints with sterile lives. There are fresh, growing disciples with fruitful influence. And Jesus is intolerant enough to tell us that only by growth will there be fruit.

IV.

Think, finally, of the instance of intolerance that Jesus gives us in John 12:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

Dogmatically, demandingly, Jesus insists that conquest comes through crucifixion and larger life through willing death.

Here is a message for Christians, many of whom have received a new life from Christ but have not died to an old self. The result is needless conflict—conflict within.

A Christian woman of far more than ordinary culture and intelligence was in such conflict that her talents were neutralized and her life impotent. She was resentful because her husband devoted more time to Boy Scout work than she thought he should. When a neighborhood boy threw an apple through one of the windows of her new house, and left a bad spot on the delicate pink wallpaper, she became angry and upset. That night she woke up in pain. Later her doctor told her that she had rheumatoid arthritis. One day she asked him if it was true

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