

The King's Highway

AN ADVOCATE OF SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS

VOL. XXXVIII

MONCTON, N. B., DECEMBER 30, 1961

No. 525

The Dimensions of Love

by Harold B. Kuhn, in "The Herald"

"Let love be without dissimulation (hypocrisy). Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good."—Romans 12:9.

The book of Romans contains, among its almost countless treasures, a rich development of the theme of love. It begins with love as it exists in God as Revealer, continues with God's love as displayed in the Cross, shouts aloud of His love which triumphs over all possible changes in our fortunes, and finally leads us to rejoice in love wrought. Chapter 12 begins with an altar call, enjoining a total consecration of self, and a crisis transformation through grace, which shall in turn be the all-inclusive ground for a new level of life.

Our text, found several verses later, suggests to us that love is no flabby, two-dimensional sentiment, but rather the full-blown quality of life which can come to grips with the problems and exigencies which are a part of our pilgrimage here. We shall note at the outset the dimension of love as set in its basic nature; then later its active quality as a discriminating and self-committing dynamic in human life.

"Let love be without hypocrisy," cries Paul. While life involves many and specialized duties, love is a basic quality which sheds its rays upon them all. And this source of individualized action is to be sincere, transparent, without mixture of "false seeming." It is interesting that there are two types of hypocrites in our time. There are the familiar hypocrites who strive to appear better than they really are. Then, too, there are those who designedly strive to appear worse than their appearances would indicate. Neither of these forms has a great deal in common with the Christian standard and ideal.

Dear friend, there can be no love where no honesty is! Now, there is hypocrisy which readily identifies itself as such; this need trouble us but little here. The real danger which lies in wait for us all is the tendency to pretend a benevolence which we do not feel. It is normal to desire smooth and kindly relationships with one's fellows, but this very commendable wish conceals a latent danger, which all too frequently becomes a patent evil. To pretend love where no real corresponding emotion exists is actually to fail to love. It generally indicates only selfishness—an exaggerated self-love.

Love must, to be true to its own quality, be without the polite hypocrisies which our social duties seem at times to force upon us. And yet, to maintain the standard enjoined here is exceedingly difficult. To the unregenerate it is, indeed, quite impossible. For the Christian, it seems to me, it involves a prior proving of that "good and acceptable, and perfect will of God" in a transfigured life. Small wonder it is that in the language of Christian sanctity the terms "Christian perfection" and "perfect love" are practically synonyms.

It is only when believers are completely delivered from the monstrous tyranny of sin's inbeing that their

hearts can be captured by "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" in which the purged self shares in the Christ-giving love of the heavenly Father. Only such will be able to love without hypocrisy, with a love transparent and unsullied by cant.

Notice, again, the text. It is no accident that the inspired writer followed this lofty and highly-inclusive statement with precepts which plumb the depth which a true God-implanted love may possess. "Abhor that which is evil!!" There are occasions in which love may properly and legitimately hate. The Psalmist suggested this same thought as he said, "I hate them with a perfect hatred." Love which has no loathing for evil, and no power of vehemence against it, is a shallow sentiment. There is a recoil from impurity and taint which belongs to the clean.

This command cuts across, almost with rudeness, our facile compromises, our counterfeit charity, and our desires for indiscriminating toleration. Basic to the abhorrence of evil is the power to discern, both in the field of opinion and in the area of practical life, the mind of God in relation to sin. Certainly it will have no truck with those who strike out from the portrait of God His own attitude of abhorrence of evil.

Yet we feel somehow that abhorrence of evil, important as it is among love's dimensions, can scarcely exist without its counterpart of a firm grasp upon what is good. Not surprised are we to read immediately following the words, "Cleave (cling) to that which is good." We may state as a general rule that few persons who are tepid in their attitude toward evil will be vigorous in their advocacy of righteousness. No doubt the opposite is equally true: those who are passive toward that which is right and holy will likewise tend to be wavering or weak in their responses in the presence of strident and militant evil.

It needs to be observed, finally, that the love which is transparent and sincere, and which is capable of a rightly-directed hatred for evil no less than a properly-aimed affection for good, must operate within bounds. We are persuaded that God's love loses nothing by being spread over the whole of mankind. Human love, on the other hand, is infected with the tendency to be strong only when kept within narrow limits. Like a river, when it extends itself, it becomes shallow and loses both its force and its purity.

There is a sense in which this must always be the case with us—at least in the life that now is. But in a very real sense, the love which is made perfect in the Spirit-cleansed life possesses a depth which channels it. If there be anything which will prevent the degeneration of "love in general" from shallow charity to universal indifference, it is the element of dimension which the Holy Spirit infuses into the cleansed heart.

We dare to assert (for to deny it is unthinkable) that

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