

# A Narrow Path and a Wide Heart

by C.H. Mackintosh

We must never forget that, while we stand in grace, we are to walk in holiness; and as regards the assembly, if we refuse to judge bad doctrine and bad morals, we are not on the ground of the Assembly of God at all. People say we must not judge; God says we must. "Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." If the assembly at Corinth had refused to judge that wicked person, it would have forfeited all title to be regarded as the assembly of God, and all who feared the Lord would have had to leave it. It is a very solemn matter indeed to take the ground of the Assembly of God. All who do so have to bear in mind that it is not at all a question of whom we can receive or what we can tolerate, but what is worthy of God? We hear a great deal now-a-days about the "broad" and the "narrow;" we have just to be as broad and as narrow as the Word of God.

It is one of our great difficulties at the present moment -- indeed it has ever been a difficulty -- to combine a narrow path with a wide heart. There is very much on all sides tending to produce isolation. We cannot deny it. Links of human friendship seem so fragile; so many things crop up to shake confidence; so many things which one cannot possibly sanction, that the path becomes more and more isolated.

All this is unquestionably true. But we must be very careful as to how we meet this condition of things. We have little idea how much depends on the spirit in which we carry ourselves in the midst of scenes and circumstances which, all must admit, are uniquely trying.

For example, I may retreat in upon myself and become bitter, gloomy, severe, repulsive, withered up, having no heart for the Lord's people, for His service, for the holy and happy exercises of the assembly. I may become barren of good works, having no sympathy with the poor, the sick, the sorrowful. I may live in the narrow circle in which I have withdrawn, thinking only of myself and my personal and family interests.

What can be more miserable than this? It is the most deplorable selfishness, but we do not see it because we are blinded by our inordinate occupation with other people's failures.

Now it is a very easy matter to find flaws and faults in our brethren and friends. But the question is, How are we to meet these things? Is it by retreating in upon

ourselves? Never! To do this is to render ourselves as miserable in ourselves as we are worthless, and worse than worthless, to others. There are few things more pitiable than what we call "a disappointed man." He is always finding fault with others. He has never discovered the real root of the matter or the true secret of dealing with it. He has retired, but within himself. He is isolated, but his isolation is utterly false. He is miserable; and he will make all who come under his influence - all who are weak and foolish enough to listen to him - as miserable as himself. He has completely broken down in his practical career; he has succumbed to the difficulties of his time and proved himself wholly unequal to meet the stern realities of actual life. Then, instead of seeing and confessing this, he retires into his own narrow circle and finds fault with everyone except himself.

How truly delightful and refreshing to turn from this dismal picture to the only perfect Man who ever trod this earth! His path was indeed an isolated one - none more so. He had no sympathy with the scene around Him. "The world knew Him not." "He came unto His own [Israel], and His own received Him not." "He looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but He found none." Even His own beloved disciples failed to sympathize with, or understand Him. They slept on the mount of transfiguration in the presence of His glory and they slept in the Garden of Gethsemane in the presence of His agony. They roused Him out of His sleep with their unbelieving fears and were continually intruding upon Him with their ignorant questions and foolish notions.

How did He meet all this? In perfect grace, patience and tenderness. He answered their questions; He corrected their notions; He hushed their fears; He solved their difficulties; He met their need; He made allowance for their infirmities; He gave them credit for devotedness in the moment of desertion; He looked at them through His own loving eyes and loved them, notwithstanding all. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

Christian reader, let us seek to drink into our blessed Master's spirit and walk in His footsteps. Then our isolation will be of the right kind, and though our path may be narrow, the heart will be large.

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