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Foreword

THE subtitle of this book—*An Aid to Deeper Repentance*—must be taken seriously if my dear friend Roy Hession’s purpose in writing it is to be fulfilled. After fifteen or twenty years of softening-up by worldly influences in the Church, including the statement in court by an Anglican bishop that the adultery in a certain novel was a form of “holy communion,” we are not likely to find this call to deeper repentance in this area of life comfortable.

The worship of Eros has become as much a feature of the western world as was its parallel cult at Ephesus in the days of St. Paul. God’s standards are the same now as then; but as this book stresses, His grace is the same too.

Chapter 7 says “The church at Corinth was a church of converted and delivered fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, and drunkards. And why not?—that is what the church is meant to be, a bunch of sinners, saved by the grace of God!”

This is how the grace of God is magnified by the author, and as he takes us deeper into the nature of sin we find that none of us is guiltless and so all of us are candidates for the grace of God which comes to us through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If the book achieves its purpose of moving us to deeper repentance it will also enable us to know and enjoy the grace of God in a new and deeper way.

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One



Strange Title?

NO SINS cause so much sorrow and shame and so many unhappy complications, both personal and social, as sexual sins. In traveling during the past forty years all over the British Isles, the United States, and other parts of the world ministering the gospel of Christ, I have found myself brought into contact with many situations of great need, sorrow, and perplexity which have been brought about by what I have called in the title of this book “sexual sin.” I have found these situations abounding on all hands, sometimes within the church itself, either among its new converts who have yet to be disentangled from some aspects of their former life or among its older members who have been taken captive.

The purpose of this first chapter is to outline the meaning and scope of this little book with its apparently strange subtitle set out in full on the title page: *“An Aid to Deeper Repentance.”* Even while we survey the problems and miseries caused by man’s sin, we know (or ought to know) that the grace of God has a complete answer to all such problems. God’s grace is ever greater than man’s sin. As someone has said, “Jesus delights not only to forgive the messer, but to unness the mess.” Once things go wrong in a life, His only concern is with recovery.

He does not hold inquests or seek to apportion blame, but simply asks each in turn the question He asked the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda long ago, "Wilt thou be made whole?" For it is in the area of recovering the losses, complications, and miseries caused by man's sin that He is expert. If I may say so, He is at His best here and it is His innumerable successes in the realm of recovery that make His name great.

But (and this is an important but) the answer of God's undeserved grace is ever contingent on man's unreserved repentance. Only in the place of repentance do men become candidates for the grace of God. Today, however, repentance has become the missing note of the gospel. Men do not know how to repent. Even among Christians the call to repent falls strangely on their ears, especially when it is addressed to *them*, and not only to those that are without. More than that, men do not know where to repent, in particular with regard to sexual misbehavior and the situations created by it. So often they do not see the basic wrong they have committed. If they repent at all, it might almost be said they are repenting of the wrong things. The factors in such misbehavior with which a moral God must be inevitably most concerned have been forgotten, and because there has not been repentance *there*, in the matter about which God has been most contending with them, the full answer of His grace is not experienced and the wonderful recovery He could have given them is never fully theirs.

It is to highlight these forgotten factors that these pages are written, in the hope that some may be able, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, to humble themselves and repent of those basic wrongs which they have committed, and that in thus repenting they may taste the sweetness of the grace of God for sinners, a grace that not only forgives the

sinner but makes over again the marred vessel—himself and his situation—so that he may have boundless cause to sing:

*Who is a pardoning God like Thee,
Or who has grace so rich and free?*

If the purpose of the book is to be “an aid to deeper repentance,” as the subtitle suggests, it is only that it may offer help and encouragement to the sinner—what the Apostle Paul calls “everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.”¹

I realize that when it comes to matters of sexual behavior, nearly everybody regards himself as an expert! There has been so much airing of the subject these days, that many have well-developed ideas on the subject and for that reason some may be inclined to read these chapters rather quizzically. But they have been written to those in desperate need, as a sort of lifeline cast out to them as they struggle with the waves. If it be thought that the approach to these problems is somewhat simplistic and does not take account of modern thought on the subject, I like to think it is because the Bible itself is simplistic, calling sin, sin, without apology, but offering to every penitent the plenteous grace of God that covers all his failures and redeems him out of all his troubles.

These chapters are not concerned with merely giving good advice and suggesting guidelines for human behavior to prevent wrongs being committed and grave damage being done. They assume rather that the wrong has already been committed, that the damage has already been done, that it is now too late for good advice. The question now is, Is there any good news to give to people in such a condition? The answer is yes, a thousand times yes.

1. 2 Thess. 2:16.

Two



Forgotten Factors

TODAY our society is so sex-obsessed that if it thinks of wrong sexual behavior at all, it seems to think of it only in terms of the illicit sex act itself—the lustfulness of it, the uncleanness of it, the uncontrolled passion of it, the perverted use of it. If that is the main wrong of sexual misbehavior, it is easy for men to make excuses for themselves and to sidestep the conviction of the Holy Spirit. “Surely,” they say, “it is something merely biological, something quite natural. It is purely arbitrary on the part of society, even of God, to draw a line and say that before a certain dateline the act is wrong, but after that dateline it is right. What is done may be lustful, but it is none the less natural.” If the main sinfulness of such misbehavior is the lustfulness and impurity of the act itself, it is easy for men to argue in this way.

Strange to say, that is the aspect with which the Bible, which is the only expression of the mind of God we have on the subject, is least concerned. Make no mistake, the Bible does condemn unequivocally sexual misbehavior because of its lustfulness and uncleanness. The fact that our Authorized Version describes such sins in Elizabethan English has robbed its words of much of their meaning for the modern mind. Forni-

cation, adultery, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, uncleanness, lasciviousness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence are the words used. But what do they mean to the modern English-speaking man? Once we exchange those words for their present-day equivalents—promiscuity, immorality, unfaithfulness, prostitution, homosexuality, masturbation, lesbianism, lustful imaginations, indulgence in pornographic literature, etc.—we all know what the Bible is talking about. And it is surprising how much it does speak about these things. There is not one of Paul’s epistles—addressed, mark you, to Christians—in which he does not speak about them and the people who do them. And when we hear him say, “for which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience,”¹ and again, “of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God,”² there is no doubt at all that the Bible condemns these things for their lustfulness, impurity, and perversion.

But even so, I say again, that is the aspect with which the Bible seems to be less concerned. It speaks about the physical aspects of sex, both right and wrong, with a complete absence of squeamishness or shock. Though nothing is hidden in its accounts, it is very difficult for even the most lustful of readers to get a vicarious enjoyment out of the things alluded to—mainly because that is not the purpose for which it is written, which certainly cannot be said of many of the books that are published today, even when they purport to be great literature. All the allusions in Scripture to sex, even to the most degraded forms of sex, are clean; and more, they are penetrating. God is out to get to the bigger wrongs behind

1. Col. 3:6.

2. Gal. 5:21.

these things, where men are utterly culpable and without excuse, where the offense is seen to be against eternal moral principles, which are part of God's own nature and are written into man's nature in his conscience. And here, of course, we are in the realm where sexual misbehavior is no different from any other misbehavior. Sin is simple self-centeredness, independence of God, and that is basically always the same. It is only the raw material in which sin operates which changes. One man's raw material may be sexual desire; another's may be a desire for the top spot. It is the degree in which a man indulges himself in his particular raw material in defiance of the known will of God that constitutes the degree of his sinfulness. God then insists on judging sexual misbehavior on the same principles as He judges any other misbehavior, and that, rightly understood, is what makes His judgment such an awesome thing for us.

The factors, however, which constitute the real wrong of sexual misbehavior have been largely forgotten today. When men and women in some crisis of their lives try to repent of their sins along this line, they seldom get beyond confessing the lustfulness and impurity of them. God, however, wants to get to something deeper than that, in which they are far more culpable—such things as the wrong which one person inflicts on another through sexual misbehavior, the multiplied duplicities which are invariably involved in such misadventures, the dishonor a person does to his own body through abuse of its powers, and above all, the wrongs done to a loving God. These are some of the forgotten factors which one so seldom hears confessed. Those who might assert they have repented might find on closer examination that they have never really faced the more culpable aspects of their deeds, and for that reason have not ever really experienced the full answer of the

grace of God. Sometimes a man who has come to Christ and accepted Him as his Savior is obviously lacking in his experience of the grace of God. His testimony is somehow not a sinner's testimony, and he does not seem to possess a sinner's joy in his all-forgiving Savior. It may be there has not been repentance at the level that God wants it. It may be he has not seen the most culpable factors in his sin, or if he has seen them, he has conveniently forgotten them.

So we come to consider in detail the forgotten factors in the various forms of sexual misbehavior—and indeed in all misbehavior.