

UNINTENTIONAL ERROR IS STILL ERROR

Some time ago I was given a list of religious statements with a request to evaluate how they square with Scripture. Having heard similar expressions from the lips of Mennonite ministers, I began to reflect on the problem of theological influence. How much are Mennonite leaders being influenced in unhealthy ways? Very much, I concluded. Those who have had seminary training reflect some of the theological bias of the institutions that trained them. The rest are being influenced, perhaps even more subtly, by available literature of the day. Few among us can claim to be original thinkers, and fewer still can demonstrate that we are.

Some ministers are using nice-sounding and catchy phrases found in Pentecostal and Holiness literature. Others give evidence of reading and study under writers in the Augustinian and Calvinist tradition. We claim to hold the views of the Apostles and

the early church fathers who lived in a time before there was an Augustine and before church and state were united.

We must acknowledge there has been a serious lack of literature written by Anabaptists and a corresponding struggle with unity of ideas. What the Anabaptists and early Mennonite leaders might have written had there been freedom of worship and expression, we do not know. Must we admit, reluctantly, that it would be almost impossible to produce a theology or commentary that would meet the general approval of our ministers at this time? Certainly, outside influences have seriously hindered unity of thought and conviction among Mennonite ministers.

I do not intend to recount in this article the score or more of debated truths among us that make for disunity. To know that we profess to be Biblicists, however, is encouraging. It is my prayer that more and more we may seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit so that He may interpret His own writings to us for our understanding and for the glory of God.

Unintentional error is as much error as that which comes in malicious propaganda. While the motive of a minister may be right, if he teaches error,

the results still are serious. If a doctor should write a wrong prescription in all good faith and the pharmacist detects death in the prescription, what should he do? Or if a doctor writes a correct prescription, and the pharmacist makes an *unintentional* error, would the patient escape physical disaster? So it is with doctrinal error. If an idea is not Scriptural, it is not a good prescription for the soul. The Biblical writers were not slow to warn us of the effects of error.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF QUESTIONABLE STATEMENTS

Here is a list of statements about Jesus' work for us on the cross. Some are from the list referred to at the beginning of this article, and some are drawn from other sources. They come from fundamentalist sources, not the writings of modernists. As such, they no doubt are intended to make plain the way of salvation to inquiring and listening souls and to bring honor to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. However, they still contain what I have chosen to call "unintentional error."

1. Someone else has drawn our wages; someone else has received our sentence; someone else has received the *second death* in our place. That person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2. No mere human could have paid the price for all sin, but it was the God-man, Jesus Christ, who received *our penalty*, who hung on the cross for us.
3. We can't imagine *the horror of hell*, of being altogether separated from God; and we need never experience it because Christ has gone through that for us.
4. He sent His only Son from the courts of heaven, in the Man Christ Jesus, who willingly took our place and received *our punishment* of death and hell.
5. He knew that this death on the cross meant not only physical death, but also the agony of hell itself for Him, because as He hung on the cross He was *separated* from God; He was *abandoned* by God.
6. The Lord took our place as a *lost sinner*,

separated from God that we might go to His place.

7. Christ takes our sins and we take His righteousness. Our sins are *imputed* to Christ.
8. We are clothed with *the robe* of Christ's righteousness.
9. Christ's righteousness is *imputed* to us. Our sin is *imputed* to Christ. We are as righteous as Christ. He became as sinful on the cross as we were. He *bore our penalty* on the cross. Jesus *tasted spiritual death* for us. We are guilty of Adam's sin, or we share in the guilt of our first parents. Christ's death on the cross was *penal*.
10. Righteousness of God is *imputed* to us, and we can wear that robe in this life and come forth in the resurrection wearing that robe.

Where do people get their authority for statements like these? Likely they would answer that these ideas are based on the Scriptures. But what