

Levi Pennington

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Pennington to Gerald Dillon, March 9, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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March 9, 1948.

Gerald Dillon,
Western School of Evangelical Religion,
Jennings Lodge, Oregon.

Dear Friend:--

I was one of your very interested listeners at the recent quarterly meeting session, and I agreed so heartily with most of the things you said that I am loath to take exception to any of it; but the impression that I ought to mention some things is so persistent that I am venturing to do it, with the hope that I shall not be considered a captious critic.

It seemed to me that in your emphasis on the sacrificial death of Jesus you depreciated too much his teachings and his miracles. The bible itself, and Jesus Himself placed much emphasis on both. John said, speaking of the miracles which he had described, "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name." Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Again and again in the Sermon on the Mount He said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said but I say unto you" With all the emphasis which He and His followers placed on His teaching, and with the emphasis which He placed on the difference between His teaching and that which His hearers had known, it was a bit shocking to me to hear you say that there was nothing peculiarly new or unique in His teaching, even in the Sermon on the Mount. All through His life His teachings and His example were in such striking contrast to the old order -- surely "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do" is in striking contrast to "Blessed shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." You said that all His teachings could be found in the Old Testament. I think better of Jesus as a teacher than that. The opening of the book of Hebrews seems to indicate that God's revelation of His will was not completed until Jesus came. Let's not minimize the importance of His teaching. How could we understand the nature of His atonement unless He had taught us. "Ye must be born again" is not so clearly set forth in the Old Testament as it is in the teachings of Jesus, if indeed that teaching is really there.

Your statement that "All the principles of justice were violated in the death of Jesus" and that there is no justice in our escaping from the penalty of sin may not have meant that God was unjust, though all this was in God's plan. How could God be just and the justifier of those who believe on Jesus (Romans 3:26) if all this violated every principle of justice?

There were other places where I could not agree with you, but perhaps they are not so important. To me the meaning of Jesus' prayer in the garden was not merely that He might be spared a few more hours, to suffer and die on the cross. But "He was made sin for us", and to my mind it was that being made sin from which He shrank, with more horror and loathing

and dread than the most pure and chaste woman would feel if faced with moral contamination. He had to be made sin; it was the will of the Father as well as of the Son, but if it were possible He would gladly have brought redemption in some other way.

With your basic teaching in your sermon that the atonement which Christ made on the cross is the central theme of the gospels and of Christianity I agree heartily. In earlier days when I marked my bible I always drew a heavy line under the words "They crucified Him", and then another heavy vertical line, making the cross; and then from all parts of the two facing pages on one of which these words occurred I drew arrows pointing to that cross, the central point of all earth's history and of all Christian faith.

With the hope that these suggestions may be received in the spirit in which they are given, I am

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.