

The Rationale of the Tolerant

by Warren Berkley

The idea of sinking all our differences into a sea of "love" and sweet tolerance and uniting in division seems to be rapidly reaching every part of the religious world. Denominational bodies who have formerly harbored revenge are now skillfully defending latitudinarianism and independence of belief. Even some who have been enslaved Roman Catholics are now joining forces with Protestants to do what is called "preaching Christ." This denominational philosophy has grown swiftly in recent years until now the distinction between unity and division is nil.

One very natural outgrowth of this indulgent attitude is the conclusion that those who do not avoid controversy and are firmly devoted to contending for their convictions are merely "picking quarrels about doctrinal differences," and possessed with a tragic lack of "love." It is supposed (not demonstrated by any valid appeal to the Scriptures), that we who are followers of Christ must never be so bold and "self-righteous" as to deny or even question a religious belief and/or practice held by an honest and sincere person. In cases where we question or deny a practice, we are charged with judging, and told that we do not have the right to judge. With reference to this tolerant attitude, a few observations are in order.

Logic?

Using human reasoning and logic as their foundation, proponents of tolerance make their case. After all, they say, we are all different; and since achieving religious unity would be a colossal, if not impossible task, why not just settle for "peaceful co-existence" and stop all this disputing? But human wisdom in the form of "logic" was never intended to originate spiritual truth (1 Cor. 1-2). Any attempt, then, to contend against contending on this basis is invalid. But is their plea logical?

Consistency?

It is to be regretted that those who argue against arguing cannot see their own inconsistency. Actually, practicing what they preach would require that they leave us alone! Are we to suppose that the advocates of tolerance are opposed to all religious arguments except the one in which they are engaged? We are reminded of the double-minded, anti-legalist who binds his anti-legalism on others. He actually sets himself up as a standard and judge just as do the tolerant about whom I am writing. But their inconsistency goes further!

Selective Regard For Bible

As a finicky customer makes his way through the cafeteria line, so the tolerant folks make their way through the Bible. We are encouraged to insist on the letter of the law

when it comes to morality, for example, but "doctrinal matters" are not nearly so vital. Stamp out drunkenness, fornication and dishonesty even if the effort involves exposing and rebuking sinners; but let folks believe anything they will concerning baptism, faith, the church, the Lord's supper and worship! And, oh yes be sure to pound away loud and long about the wicked party spirit, while placing little emphasis upon "unimportant truths" such as the work and organization of the church.

But, the Lord made no such distinction between "morals" and so-called "doctrinal matters." Paul said that he had, "shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God," and Jesus said that. "man liveth by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Acts 20:27; Matt. 4:4).

Self-Righteous

Among the several planks in the platform of the "leave everybody alone" party is the charge that defenders of the truth are self-righteous. But, when we insist upon strict adherence to God's word are we demonstrating self-righteousness? If the term "self-righteous" means insisting on God's righteousness, yes! But that's hardly the idea. In fact, those who would have their own way while refusing to submit to God's righteousness are self-righteous (Rom. 10:3)!

Conclusion

There is only "one faith" (Eph. 4:5) and that faith is held by those who hear and obey God's word (Rom. 10:17). To suppose, then, that one can believe one way and another believe differently on matters revealed by God and both please God is to falsely assume that there is no "one faith" which is sufficient for all men. Jude wrote concerning the "common salvation," for salvation in Christ is enjoyed by those who, by their trust and obedience, share in "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all," (Eph. 4:4-6). Those who are thus related to one another by their kinship with God, will feel a burning desire to instruct others in the way of righteousness, not to exalt themselves as "know-it-alls" filled with angry pride, and out of a real love for lost souls and out of a desire to please the God who has commanded that they, "contend earnestly" for the faith (Jude 3). Though this will entail the exposure of every false way, the honest man who is determined to serve God on God's terms will not be offended.

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