



Biblical intolerance

I would emphasize this truth by asserting that there is an aspect of intolerance in the Christian faith: and I go further and assert that if we have not seen the intolerant aspect of the faith we have probably never seen it truly. There are many statements in Scripture to substantiate this assertion that to place anyone by the side of Jesus Christ, or to talk of salvation apart from Him, or without Him at the centre, is a betrayal and a denial of the truth. The Apostle Peter, addressing the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, said,

'There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.'

(Acts 4:12)

All false teaching is to be hated and opposed. We are told in the New Testament that it was hated by our Lord and all the apostles, and that they opposed it and warned the people against it. But I ask again; is that being done today? What about your personal attitude towards this? Are you one of those people who says that there is no need for those negatives, and that we should be content with a positive presentation of the truth? Do we subscribe to the prevailing teaching which dislikes warnings and the criticizing of false teachings? Do you agree with those who say that a spirit of love is incompatible with the negative and critical denunciation of blatant error, and that we must always be positive. The simple answer to such an attitude is that the Lord Jesus Christ denounced evil and denounced false teachers. I repeat that He denounced them as *'ravening wolves'* and *'whited sepulchres'*, and as *'blind guides'*. The Apostle Paul said of some of them, *'whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame'*. That is the language of the Scriptures. There can be little doubt but that the Church is as she is today because we do not follow New Testament teaching and its exhortations, and confine ourselves to the positive and the so-called 'simple Gospel', and fail to stress the negatives and the criticisms. The result is that people do not recognize error when they meet it. They accept what appears to be nice, and are impressed by those who come to their doors speaking about the Bible and offering books about the Bible and prophecy and so on. In their ignorant childlike condition they often help to propagate the false teaching because they see nothing wrong in it. Moreover they do not realize that error is to be hated and to be denounced. Imagining themselves to be full of a spirit of love, they are beguiled by Satan, the predatory beast who was on their track, and who has suddenly caught them and pounced upon them in his cleverness and subtlety.

It is not pleasant to be negative; it is not enjoyable to have to denounce and to expose error. But any pastor who feels in a little measure, and with humility, the responsibility which the Apostle Paul knew in an infinitely greater degree for the souls and the wellbeing spiritually of his people is compelled to utter these warnings. It is not liked and appreciated in this modern flabby generation. Far too often the pew has controlled the pulpit, and great harm has come in the Church. The Apostle warns Timothy that a time is coming when people *'will not endure sound doctrine'*. This is frequently the case at the present time, and has been so during this present century. So it is important that every member of the Church should have a true conception of the Church and the office of the ministry in particular.

There are churches in the world today which appear on the surface to be very flourishing. People crowd into them and they display much zeal and enthusiasm. But on closer examination you will find that most of the time is taken up with music of various types, and with clubs and societies and social activities. The service starts at 11 a.m. and must finish promptly at 12 noon. There will be real trouble if it does not! There is but a brief 'address' of some quarter of an hour's duration, twenty minutes as a maximum. The unfortunate minister, if he does not see these things clearly, is

afraid to go against the wishes of the majority, his livelihood depends upon church members, and the result is that everything is made to conform to the desires and wishes of the pew.

But let me add that the minister also must not dictate. It is the Lord Himself who determines, He who is seated at the right hand of God and who has given '*some, apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers*'. He has given them for the edification of the members of the Church, and it is His message that is to be preached without fear or favour. We need to recapture something of the spirit of John Knox whose preaching caused Mary Queen of Scots to tremble.

The work of the ministry is to build up the body of Christ. It is the business of the ministers to build up the Church, not to build up themselves! Alas! they have far too often built up themselves, and we read of princes of the Church living in positions of great wealth and pomp. What an utter travesty that is of Paul's teaching! Let us note also that ministers are called to build up; not to please and to entertain. The way in which they are to do this is summed up perfectly in that most lyrical passage in Acts 20. The Apostle Paul was bidding farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus, at the seaside, and this is what he said:

'And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.'

(Acts 20:32)

'The word of His grace, which is able to build you up'! It is not surprising that the Church is as she is today; she has been given philosophy and entertainment. By those means a minister may attract and keep a crowd for a while; but they cannot 'build up'; and the business of preachers is to build up, not to attract a crowd. Nothing builds up but the unadulterated Word of God. There is no authority apart from this; and it must not be modified or trimmed to suit the fashion of modern science, or some supposed 'assured results of criticism' which are always changing. It is the '*everlasting gospel*', it is the '*eternal Word*', the same Word which Paul and the other apostles preached, the same Word which the Protestant Reformers preached, and the Puritans, and the great preachers of two hundred years ago, and likewise Spurgeon in the last century without any modification whatsoever. It is because this has been so largely forgotten in the last hundred years that things are as they are today.

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