

When Controversy Comes

I do not know many people who enjoy controversy, strife, or conflict. In fact, to promote strife is sinful (Proverbs 6:16, 19). But on the other hand, to run from it when the truth and souls are involved is also sinful (Galatians 2:11). Whether we like it or not, religious controversy exists not only among brethren, but among all groups of religious people. Whether we like it or not, religious controversy will continue. Christians must know how to deal with it.

Controversy was a fact of life for Christ (Luke 12:49-53; John 15:18-21) and the apostles (Acts 17:5-8). But controversy can serve godly purposes. It can expose sin and error (Ephesians 5:11), it can identify false brethren (1 Corinthians 11:19), it can increase faith and knowledge among those who love truth (Acts 17:11), and it can protect the innocent (Romans 16:17-18).

Three facts make religious controversy necessary. First, false teaching (Matthew 7:15). False teaching must be challenged and opposed (Jude 3-4), lest it hurt many! Second, love for and loyalty to God above those in sin (Galatians 2:11-14). Paul loved Peter, but he loved truth more. Nothing can come before a defense of truth. Third, love for lost souls (Acts 13:6-12). Paul's conduct was not hatred for the false teacher, but hatred for false teaching and love for the lost! Some would apologize to Elymas for Paul and make excuses, characterizing him as rude, harsh, and undiplomatic! But love compels a defense of truth.

The problems which accompany controversy must be overcome. First there are carnal attacks upon people who try to discover truth. Some people attack the man (his motives, character, and credentials) rather than his arguments using ridicule, scorn, humor, name calling, etc. (2 Corinthians 10:1-3, 10). When we oppose error, be careful to address the error, not man! Second, there is the twisting of scriptures to uphold truth. In heat of controversy, we can misapply scripture while trying to uphold truth! Truth, correctly interpreted and used, is sufficient to oppose error (2 Timothy 2:14-19; 2 Peter 3:16, 18). Third, there are emotional prejudices and sinful attitudes which blind us to truth. Truth must be our standard, not our relation to the teacher (Luke 12:51-53). Finally, there is the danger of delay. Error and sin left unopposed fosters more sin (Galatians 2:5)!

We are in a battle against evil (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). By keeping godly motives, we can serve godly purposes when controversy arises. Overcome the pitfalls which turn controversy over truth into sin upon sin (1 Timothy 1:18)!

Anonymous