

The New Conservative

Introduction. The term "conservative" means "holding to traditional attitudes and values and cautious about change or innovation, typically in relation to politics or religion." Brethren have commonly used this term to describe those who hold true to the scriptures. This is not without precedent as the Bible clearly teaches that we are to be conservative in our understanding and application of the Bible (Joshua 1:7; Titus 1:9; Revelation 22:18-19).

Yet, despite the clear teaching of the Bible, there seems a growing sentiment among brethren who are annoyed and uncomfortable with all that being conservative requires. For this reason, we need to know more about what is so disenchanting with the "old paths" of scripture (Jeremiah 6:16).

I. ***His Greatest Annoyance Is The Necessity Of Authority***

- A. The Bible teaches that we must have authority for everything we believe, practice, and teach (Matthew 21:23; 28:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1).
- B. However, this makes the new conservative uncomfortable; the restrictions anger him.
 1. He questions why we must have authority. He might ponder, "Suppose a man wanted to sing hymns with instrumental accompaniment in his own home? Why does he need authority for that?" "Who am I to say someone is wrong for using instruments in singing hymns in his home?" "Are we not being arbitrarily strict? Is this not a silly debate?" The answer is found in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.
 2. Some may think that the only reason we oppose Christmas and Easter as holy days is because it came from Catholicism. This is incorrect, for brethren oppose it because it is not supported by the "oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

II. ***His Greatest Worry Is That By Being Conservative, He Is Being Divisive***

- A. It is a laudable trait to be very concerned about being divisive. In fact, we all need to be keenly attuned to whether or not we are divisive and doggedly avoid being so.
- B. But, conservatism is not sinfully divisive per se. The truth is necessarily divisive between lovers of truth and lovers of error (Matthew 10:34-36; Acts 17:32; 1 Peter 4:4).
- C. Every servant of the Lord must be bold in opposing those who oppose themselves, hoping to lead them to repentance (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

III. ***His Greatest Suspicion Is "We"***

- A. He bristles at the notion that we can be right, while others are wrong. He always views us as wrong first.
- B. He views "us" as hypocritical because we are doing what we condemn in others.
 - 1. Some are hypocrites, but not everyone (Matthew 7:1-5). Must one always be presumed a hypocrite when he opposes something?
 - 2. No, one is a hypocrite when he is guilty of a similar sin that he condemns in others (Romans 2:1-3, 21-23).
- C. It is right, in fact, it is commanded, that we question and oppose error that we see around us (Acts 15:1-2; 17:11; 20:29-30; Ephesians 5:11).
- D. At the same time, we must question our own practices to make sure we are not hypocrites (1 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

IV. ***His Greatest Relief Would Be If We Could Be More Broadly United***

- A. Just like the desire to not be a hypocrite, it is a good desire to maintain unity whenever possible (Psalm 133:1; Romans 12:18; 14:19; Hebrews 12:14).
- B. But, we cannot have fellowship with everyone, no matter how badly we may want it (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 John 1:7).
- C. Whether the Old Testament or the New Testament, God's people were always told to correct their doctrinal or moral problems, not tolerate them.

Conclusion. The new conservative sounds a lot like the old ecumenical. Was Jesus too narrow-minded and Pharisaical (Matthew 15:7-9)? Was Paul denominationally inclined for being restrictive (Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 5:10)? Did any apostle counsel us to tolerate opposing views, if those views are erroneous (Romans 16:17)? When does cancerous doctrine become a problem -- when it is fully developed, or when the first sign of it appears (2 Timothy 2:17)? If sin is like leaven in the church, should we not address it until the whole lump is leavened (1 Corinthians 5:6)? We cannot let the church lose its distinctiveness, and if we fail, who will be left to pick up the banner?

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