Controversy

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No man has ever accomplished anything of importance in shaping the destiny of the world unless he exhibited a great deal of *combativeness*. The truth of this proposition will not be questioned we presume, by any well-informed person. Yet the popular idea is that combativeness is no longer a virtue in the pulpit. Some actually prefer a preacher who studiously avoids controversy, believing that the interests of the church are best served by such a course.

In this we should let Christ and the apostles, with the reformers of every age, be our example rather than those "qualified, called, and sent" whose mission seems to be the popularizing of sectarianism by floating with the current of worldly opinion and catering to the fashionable follies and perverted tastes of a fickle, covetous generation, forever whining and whimpering about the sinfulness of controversy while availing themselves of every opportunity to slander their neighbors, and peddle their garbage and stale nonsense against those they do not understand, and whose arguments they have never heard nor read. Until people shall conclude to "walk by the same rule, to mind the same things" (Phil. 3:16) there will and there *ought to be* conflict – a comparison of views and positions. That rule ought to be the Bible.

Jesus Was Combative

Jesus began His controversial career with the doctors of the law when He was but twelve years of age. In prosecuting the work His Father had given Him to do, the foundations of time-honored superstitions were torn up, false doctrines pierced with the arrows of truth, hypocrites exposed, and vain Rabbis and self-confident lawyers and doctors were silenced and put

to shame in the presence of astonished multitudes. No man approached Him for discussion and went away empty.

He proved to be more than a conqueror of the learning, philosophy and theology of His age, until His fame as a disputant became such that "No man dared to ask him a question" (Luke 20:40). You may say, "Yes, but we can't hope to succeed because He did." Well, that depends on circumstances. If we preach what He taught and *nothing else*, we can succeed in spite of all opposition. We may lose our lives, as He lost His, but the truth will triumph.

The Apostles

The apostle who says, "I labored more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor. 15:10) was in constant controversy with all the theories, subversive to the Gospel then in existence. And to this fact we refer for a solution of the question, "Why are we more indebted to Paul than to any other apostle for our knowledge of Christianity?" With Paul it mattered little whether reasoning of a "judgment to come" (Acts 24:25) until Felix trembled, or reproving the Athenian senators for their ignorance of the God that made them, or stilling the excited rabble at Jerusalem with a "wave of the hand," or exposing the evil designs of Judaizing teachers, or withstanding Peter to his face "because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). He was ever the willing advocate of that truth by which he had been made free – a *triumphant controversialist*. He shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God.

Uninspired Men

Martin Luther was perhaps the most combative man who has lived since the apostle Paul, hence he became the prince of the reformers. By controversy he roused Catholicism from her lethargy – shook the minds of thousands of slaves, and left the imprint of his character on half the world.

What would some of our modern preachers, who are afraid of "hurting someone's feelings" if they exposed the errors of their neighbors' religion in *plain* language do if they were placed where Luther was. I will tell you – *nothing!* Why did Philip Melancthon, the urban, eloquent, and learned compeer of Luther fail to lead the people as Luther led them when he became his successor? He was afraid of "hurting somebody's feelings." These are representative men, they stand at the head of two classes. Melancthon proved himself incompetent to wield the sword of Luther. Why? He was the equal, some might say superior, to Luther in every trait save one – combativeness. A good man without combativeness is like a dog without teeth or a fighting bull without horns – disposed to compromise.

"I like that word compromise, it sounds charitable" says a group of my brethren who have the backbone of a jellyfish. But not so fast gentlemen! Compromise is alright when you argue with your wives, but in religion Jesus speaks, we obey. The truth knows no compromise with error.

Alexander Campbell

How did Alexander Campbell accomplish his grand work? By "letting other peoples doctrines alone?" Don't you believe it. "Oh, we can't all be Campbells" you say. That is true, but we can all "fight on the same line." And we must do it or fail in our grand design of restoring New Testament Christianity.

Opposed to controversy, are you? We are indebted to it more than any other moving cause for our civil and religious liberties. Protestantism was the child of controversy, and Protestantism gave birth to American freedom. Not only this, but we are indebted to the controversial teachings and writings of Campbell, Stone, Scott, and many others for our present position in light and knowledge. We do not depend on "the natural increase of baptized children" or any other human

invention, but upon the Word of God that is “sharper than a two edge sword” (Heb. 4:12). No man can faithfully proclaim that Word without bringing it “as a fire and a hammer that breaketh the rock to pieces,” (Jer. 23:29) to bear on the corrupters which rear their ugly heads, professing to be followers of Christ. Jesus foresaw it and said, “I came not to bring peace on earth, but a sword” (Matt. 24:44). The man who seeks peace with the advocates of error, by concession of the truth, is not a friend of Christ. He who expects to gain anything by debate does not hesitate to engage in it, while he who fears the light of the truth shrinks from it like a cockroach does to a spotlight.

Let Them Alone

Our sectarian neighbor inquires, “Why don’t you just preach the Gospel and let others alone?” Well, the fact is we cannot do this. Can the sectarian preacher do it? No, and he does not do it. Watch this: Is Presbyterianism the Gospel? If it is the Baptist preacher does not preach it. Can a Lutheran preach his doctrine and let the Methodist, Episcopalian, et. at., alone? Why certainly not. If Lutheranism is the Gospel then all preachers are bound to preach what is called Lutheranism. But do all preachers preach it? If each particular sect were to preach the Gospel and nothing but the Gospel, there would be no cause for contention. They may all teach some Gospel, but in addition they preach something else and it is this *something else* that the Christian objects to, and finds fault with.

If it is possible for a man to preach the Gospel and let others alone, how will he go about doing it? What kind of a Gospel will he preach? Certainly not the Gospel of Christ for that was not designed to leave any responsible creature alone. It is essentially aggressive. It knows no compromise. It recognizes no flag of truce. It demands an unconditional surrender.

Was it a rosy, milk and honey Gospel that the apostles preached? Did the Gospel in their hands please sectarians and infidels? What about the mobs, the murders, the exiles and confiscation that marked the apostolic era? What was said of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica? “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (Acts 17:6). They openly attacked the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the idolaters and the heretical church members. The consequence was that Christians were soon distinguished as “the sect that is everywhere spoken against” (Acts 28:22). Why was it that the Romans who were troublesome to no nation on account of their religion, and who allowed the Jews to live under their own laws and follow their own method of worship, treated the Christians alone with such severity? Simply because Christians denounced the state religion of Imperial Rome.

We do not delight in controversy merely for the sake of controversy. In fact, we are anxious that it cease. We have gained ground in our struggles, yet we desire to make a Proposition for Peace. Here is our proposition: *If they will leave our affairs alone, we will leave them alone*. They say that we are always fighting them – we never preach a sermon without abusing them and that our publications are filled with articles assailing them. Perhaps they fail to understand our intentions. We have no right to assail them or to interfere with their affairs as long as we are left at peace to perform our own work – which is to preach the Gospel of Christ and if we have any controversy with them, it must be because *they interfere* in *some way* with our work.

I say again, if they will leave us alone we will leave them alone. I think we have a right to demand that they shall not assail the things we hold sacred or misquote our authors. For instance, we believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, and should be so regarded by all men. We regard ourselves as being assailed when our religious neighbors call it a “dead letter,” “the mere word” and other slighting and opprobrious

names. When it is rudely and violently dealt with, they ought not to wonder that we feel hurt.

And they misquote our authors. We hold the apostle Paul in high esteem and we have often been grieved to hear him misquoted and misrepresented – as in Romans 1:16 – "I am not ashamed of religion," or Romans 5:1 – "Therefore being justified by faith only" – or Mark 16:16 – "He that believeth shall be saved." We consider this as an offensive stab at us, since it attacks the constitution of the Lord's church, and misrepresents one of its fundamental laws.

Matthew 15:14

The Savior Himself says, "Let them alone," and He says it in reference to the Pharisees. If we should leave the sectarians and false teachers (liberals, etc.) alone, we would conclude that better people than the Pharisees should, by all means, be left alone. If we can determine in which we should leave them alone, we will understand our whole duty in the premises. The Lord's own example should serve us well. Jesus was teaching that we should "let alone" those who are determined and persistent in following error and in His own words: "If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch." In other words, leave them to the fate that awaits them. Being religious teachers whose teaching was not authorized by the Word of God, their influence was destined to utter destruction. Being blind leaders, both they and those they were leading would be destroyed. Thus, we can see the error of those who conclude that if a man is a blind leader or a blind follower of a blind leader, that his blindness will save him from the ditch.

The Pharisees were to be left to their fate; but whether the meaning is that they were not to be annoyed by telling them of their sins and their coming destruction, or that no further effort was to be made to save them from it, or whether they

were to be let alone in some other way, we cannot scripturally say unless we look further into the context. The statement of Jesus was spoken in response to the remark: Matt. 15:12 “Knowest not that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?” Instead of being permitted to appease the wrath of the Pharisees the disciples are told to let them alone, and another statement is made, which, if it comes to the ears of the Pharisees will but make them more angry. The letting alone consists of neither doing nor saying anything to atone for the offence which had been taken.

We can justly appreciate this case when we consider the saying of Jesus, at which the Pharisees had taken offence. It is this: “Ye hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophecy of you, saying, This people draw near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:7-9). What kind of letting alone was this? Not the kind that is urged today. It is not what we understand by letting people alone is it? Very few false teachers want to be left alone this way. He was simply telling His disciples to let them alone when they were inclined to make some apology for what He had said that offended the Pharisees. The lesson then is this – that when men become offended at the truth, they should be left unmolested to all the enjoyment they can find in their ill-humor. Of course, this is only when the rebuke is just. You do not have to insult a man to teach him the Truth. Jesus did not rebuke the Pharisees every time He saw them, nor did He always rebuke them as severely as on this occasion. Their false teaching He sometimes refuted by calmly exhibiting the truth, and some times, without an attempt at refutation, He denounced it in tones of thunder.

When the good of the people, the defense of the truth, the exposure of false teaching, can be best accomplished with all fearlessness, and if men become offended—let them alone. The same sword is still on its mission. *Preach* the Word, brother.

Deceased