

Proper and Improper Controversy

We should all recognize that a certain bit of controversy is inevitable if there is to be growth and if the church is to be kept pure. Faithful servants of the Lord are to go out into an unbelieving world and earnestly contend for the faith. Reproving and rebuking are in order when error in practice or in doctrine appear. Christ and the apostles fought a good fight. They were worthy controversialists. They abhorred sin and opposed it, and so should we.

The church at Jerusalem was not destroyed when there was “much disputing” over the necessity of the Gentiles keeping the Jewish ordinances (Acts 15:7). Brethren then studied and taught calmly and avoided bitterness, so the serious question was resolved and unity that pleased the apostles and the whole church prevailed (Acts 15:22). Brethren, we should be able to differ without anger and malice as we study topics about which there are differences in understanding.

Avoiding foolish and unlearned questions would do much to avoid the envy and strife and the useless and improper controversy. This requires skill in discernment to separate truth from the error, and there should be special concern for the humble babe in Christ who does not understand.

It is a very significant danger signal when brethren begin to object to all study of subjects about which there is controversy. Truth can be tried in the fire of debate, but error thrives under the wet blanket of “no controversy allowed.” Heresy is brought in “privily” (2 Peter 2:1). Let some vigilant elder or preacher cry aloud when some perverse doctrine or practice is slipping into the family. Let us pray that we may come to learn by studying topics which are not understood by all rather than developing factions with closed minds and bitterness. There will, of course, always be different levels of understanding between the babes in Christ and the well taught giants among us. The “great plainness of speech” is used to help (2 Cor. 3:12). Please do not object to that which is necessary to the spiritual well being of the church.

- by Irven Lee

The Scriptures and Gossip

The gossipers oft’ begin their tales of woe with well-worn phrases, such as, “**They say.**” or “**Have you heard?**” or apologetically, “**I hate to tell you this, but...**” And thus, the tale unfolds. One might think that the Bible is silent on this subject, as gossip is so widespread. Yet, the very opposite is true. Here are a few of the many passages.

“Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him” (Lev 19:16-17).

“He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool” (Prov. 10:18).
“A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” (Prov. 18:7-8)

“It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling” (Prov. 20:3).
“He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips” (Prov. 20:19). *“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth”* (Proverbs 26:20).

Concerning the listener, we are reminded that *“a wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue”* (Proverbs 17:4).

Tattlers and gossipers are meddlers in other men’s affairs. God will judge. Our blessed Lord taught, *“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment”* (Matt. 12:35-36).

Let us carefully and prayerfully guard our speech!

- by Louis Sharp

The Bible versus Human Creeds

Thirty five years ago in the Presbyterian Survey (published by the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.), John C. Purdy dealt with the following question: "Should women be elders or deacons in the church, and is there a Scripture on this?"

This, of course, is allowed in that denomination and Purdy wrote in defense of the practice. He cited their Book of Order, Articles of Agreement, #9, noting that they "did not begin the practice until well into the 20th century ... the General Assemblies debated this matter and altered their constitutions to permit women to be ordained to these offices ..."

Don't you wonder how these men decided, after nearly 2000 years, that it was okay to have women serve as elders and deacons? Who gave them the right to legislate such things? Were they able to change something which was formerly wrong into something that is now right by a simple vote of the "General Assemblies"?

The answers to our questions are found by looking deeper into Purdy's response. He said, "The Scriptures are not a book of rules to which we can go for direct guidance on such matters. The Book of Order is such a book of rules". Do you see it? He admitted that they do not regard the Bible as a complete and perfect guide - but their own human creed book is! Amazing!!! Little wonder then that they feel free to change the rules to fit their own fancy. This problem is common throughout the denominational religious world.

Purdy concluded: "If it is not proper for women to be ordained to these offices, then the Presbyterian Church has a lot to answer for!" We agree!

AND, one final question: Are you at all surprised that this same denomination voted in their General Assembly recently to recognize and endorse same-sex marriage (by an overwhelming vote of 429 – 175)? No, we are not surprised. Once there is a departure from God's Word as the absolute standard for our faith and practice, there is no stopping place. Think!