

Controversy

by J.C. Philpot

Controversy is a necessary tool for exposing and destroying error, and establishing truth, when approached with the spirit of the gospel.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:3, 2 Timothy 2:14, 2 Timothy 2:23, Titus 3:9, Jude 1:3

Topics: "Defending The Faith", "Church Controversy"

Description

J.C. Philpot delves into the controversial topic, acknowledging the tendency of controversy to lead to strife and unedifying debates, yet recognizing its necessity in defending essential truths of the faith. He highlights historical examples where controversy was crucial in combating heresies like Arianism and Pelagianism, emphasizing the importance of contending for the faith. Philpot stresses the need to approach controversy with a spirit of seeking truth from the Scriptures, rather than personal attacks or harsh words, as the goal is to uphold foundational truths of the church.

Transcript

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Controversy is a subject that we usually avoid, as often tending more to strife and to "minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith." Imputations are made, harsh speeches used, and in the warmth of the moment expressions dropped as much at variance with the precepts as with the spirit of the gospel. The controversial writings of neither Toplady nor Huntington, eminent as both were in grace and gifts, are totally free from this blot. Yet at times controversy is not only unavoidable, but necessary. When Arianism arose in the fourth century, an Athanasius was needed to rebut and destroy it. When Pelagianism sprang up in the fifth century, an Augustine was required to overthrow it. In later days, by the controversial writings of Luther, Popery received a deadly wound; Toplady's sharp pen penetrated through John Wesley's Arminian coat of mail; and Huntington's powerful arguments demolished the moral law as a rule of life to believers. In fact, as there is not a truth which has not been attacked and denied, nor an imaginable error which has not been broached, controversy is inevitable, unless we would see truth trampled under foot.

An important error, we will say, is advanced by some man of name and influence, and sedulously propagated by him and his followers. If not at once detected and exposed, this error gradually gains

ground, and at last may become established as a truth. Such was the rise and progress of most of the errors of Popery. They were broached by men of learning or influence, and as all opposition to them was prevented by persecution, they became in time almost universally recognized. Controversy is, therefore, in such cases indispensable, and becomes a blessing to the church. It is in fact, under such circumstances, a necessary branch of "contending earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints." Controversy has winnowed truth from error; controversy has torn to pieces the robes of Satan transformed into an angel of light; and controversy has established on a firm basis, one by one, well near every article of our most holy faith.

There is nothing, then, in controversy itself intrinsically wrong. It is the abuse, not the use, which has so often made it objectionable. We desire, then, to approach the controversy before us in the spirit of the gospel, and, as far as we have light on the subject, to enter upon it without partiality or any respect of persons, our aim being, not men or ministers, but truth. It is a subject, to our mind, of weight and importance, as involving vital, essential truth. It is not a mere strife of words--a dispute about non-essentials, but touches the very foundation on which the church is built. This is, therefore, our main reason, as it must form our chief apology, for introducing the present controversy into the pages of the "Gospel Standard."

As our object is not men, but truth, we shall take no notice of any harsh speeches made on either side. Truth is not forwarded by such weapons, and, in our judgment, both parties have erred here.

The truth, on this momentous subject, can only be found in the Scriptures. All arguments, therefore, founded upon mere natural reasoning--all assertions that this or that view is absurd, irrational, improbable, or impossible, must be laid aside.

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