

# FEAR OF CONTROVERSY

by Robert Haldane

(Written in 1874 A. D.)

Many religious persons have a dread of controversy and wish truth to be stated without any reference to those who hold the opposite errors. Controversy and a bad spirit are, in their estimation, synonymous terms. And strenuously to oppose what is wrong is considered as contrary to Christian meekness. Those who hold this opinion seem to overlook what every page of the New Testament lays before us. In all the history of our Lord Jesus Christ, we never find Him out of controversy. From the moment He entered on the discharge of His office in the synagogue of Nazareth till He expired on the cross, it was an uninterrupted scene of controversy. Nor did He, with all the heavenly meekness which in Him shone so brightly, treat truth and error without reference to those who held them or study to avoid giving its proper appellation to those corruptions in doctrine or practice that endangered the interests of immortal souls. His censures were not confined to doctrine but included the abettors of false principles themselves.

And as to the Apostles, their epistles are generally controversial. Most of them were directly written for the express purpose of vindicating truth and opposing error—and the authors of heresies do not escape with an abstract condemnation of their false doctrine. Paul again and again most indignantly denounces the conduct of the opposers of the Gospel and, by name, points out those against whom he cautions his brethren. When Hymenaeus and Alexander erred concerning the faith and when he delivered them unto Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme, he did not compliment them as amiable and learned persons. Even that Apostle who treats most of love and who possessed so much of that spirit which was so eminently manifested in his Divine Master, does not avoid controversy—nor in controversy does he study to avoid severity of censure on the opposers of the truth. In the examples of opposing error (left on record for our imitation) we perceive nothing of that frigid spirit of indifference which smiles on the corrupters of the Word of God and shuns to call heresy by its proper name.

With what holy indignation do the Apostles denounce the subtle machinations of the enemies of the gospel! In vain shall we look among those faithful servants of the Lord for anything to justify that trembling reserve which fears to say decidedly that truth is truth—and error is error.

In what style, indeed, should perversions of the truth of God be censured? Ought they to be treated as mere matters of opinion on which we may innocently and safely differ? Or ought they to be met in a tone of solemn, strong and decided approbation? Paul warned Christians against men who arose from among themselves, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them—and instead of complimenting false teachers in his day, denounced an angel from heaven on the supposition of his preaching another gospel. And if an Apostle was withstood to the face, because he was to be blamed, are the writings of those who subvert the Gospel to pass without rebuke?

When the canker of the principles of neology [the use of new meanings for established words], derived from the Continent and from America, is perverting the faith of many and seducing them into the paths of error—which a spirit of lukewarmness and indifference to truth is advancing under the mask of charity and liberality, there is a loud call on all Christians to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel,” to present a firm and united phalanx of opposition to error under every name—from whatever quarter it may approach. Should believers become unfaithful to their trust and be seduced to abandon their protest against false doctrines, they may gain the approbation of the world—but what will this avail when compared with the favor of God? But if (with

prayer to God, in the use of the appointed means) they contend earnestly for the truth, then they may expect the gracious fulfillment of the blessed promise, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

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