

The Age of Tolerance

(The Broad Path of Doctrinal Indecision)

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Matthew 7:13-14

We live in an age of compromise, when absolute truth is no longer defended, error and falsehood abound, and the lines that once separated right from wrong have become blurred. The concept of absolute or fixed truth, as defined by GOD, has gone by the wayside and has been virtually forgotten and abandoned. In its place is a vague and indefinite notion of truth, based on the modern idea of tolerance, which views all beliefs as equally valid. This type of nebulous thinking has crept its way into the Church, so that now many churches no longer promote GOD's unchanging truth, but rather support the world's vacillating view of truth. Once the promoter and upholder of GOD's truth, the Church has given up the fight to embrace the world's broad view of tolerance. In the place of sound doctrine, the Church has given way to doctrinal indecision, aversion to all controversy, and acceptance of any and all views - supposedly in

the name of love and unity. To many within the Church, truth is a foggy notion at best, and there is little discernment between truth and error. In some churches, things have progressed to such an extreme that even the mere mention of "doctrine" (i.e., GOD's truth or teaching) stirs up negative responses and is viewed as divisive. What's more, anyone who dares to stand up for GOD's truth is labeled as unloving, intolerant, or narrow-minded. Whereas in the past, truth and adherence to the truth were esteemed as great virtues, today "tolerance" is touted as the highest virtue. Sadly, the Church, which was established to spread GOD's truth and influence the world, has instead been influenced by the world and adopted its mindset, even when the world's ideas clearly conflict with the Bible. GOD's Word is no longer the standard by which the Church measures right and wrong. Rather, man's ever-changing opinion and whatever is most popular or widely accepted are the guiding principles for today's Church. The Church has compromised and become a place for man-pleasers rather than GOD-fearers. The Church has left the narrow path of GOD's truth to follow the broad path of "tolerance" that leads to destruction.

This downward trend within the Church was foreseen by godly men, such as J.C. Ryle¹, who himself warned about the slippery path of compromise and the dangers of denying GOD's truth. Even in 19th century England, he could see the signs of growing corrupting influences within the Church as it became increasingly conformed to the world. Let us take note and heed Ryle's warning²:

"I cannot withhold my conviction that the professing Church of the nineteenth century is as much damaged by laxity and indistinctness about matters of doctrine *within*, as it is by sceptics and unbelievers *without*. Myriads of professing Christians nowadays seem utterly unable to distinguish things that differ. Like people afflicted with colour-blindness, they are incapable of discerning what is true and what is false, what is sound and what is unsound. If a preacher of religion is only clever and eloquent and earnest, they appear to think he is all right, however strange and heterogeneous his sermons may be. They are destitute of spiritual sense, apparently, and cannot detect error. Popery

¹ **J.C. Ryle** (1816-1900): Evangelical bishop of the Anglican Church. Revered author of *Holiness*, *Knots Untied*, *Old Paths*, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, and others. Born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

² Excerpt from "*Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*", Chapter "*Needs of the Times*", section 2; Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

or Protestantism, an atonement or no atonement, a personal Holy Ghost or no Holy Ghost, future punishment or no future punishment, High Church or Low Church or Broad Church, Trinitarianism, Arianism, or Unitarianism, nothing comes amiss to them: they can swallow it all, if they cannot digest it! Carried away by a fancied liberality and charity, they seem to think everybody is right and nobody is wrong, every clergyman is sound and none are unsound, everybody is going to be saved and nobody going to be lost. Their religion is made up of negatives; and the only positive thing about them is that they dislike *distinctness* and think all extreme and decided and positive views are very naughty and very wrong!

These people live in a kind of mist or fog. They see nothing clearly, and do not know what they believe. They have not made up their minds about any great point in the Gospel, and seem content to be *honorary members of all schools of thought*. For their lives they could not tell you what they think is truth about justification, or regeneration, or sanctification, or the Lord's Supper, or baptism, or faith, or conversion, or inspiration, or the future state. They are eaten up with a morbid dread of controversy and an ignorant dislike of party spirit; and yet they really cannot define what they mean

by these phrases. The only point you can make out is that they admire earnestness and cleverness and charity, and cannot believe that any clever, earnest, charitable man can ever be in the wrong! And so they live on undecided; and too often undecided they drift down to the grave, without comfort in their religion, and, I am afraid, often without hope.

The explanation of this boneless, nerveless, jelly-fish condition of soul is not difficult to find. To begin with, the heart of man is naturally in the dark about religion—has no intuitive sense of truth—and really needs instruction and illumination. Besides this, the natural heart in most men hates exertion in religion, and cordially dislikes patient, painstaking inquiry. Above all, the natural heart generally likes the praise of others, shrinks from collision, and loves to be thought charitable and liberal. The whole result is that a kind of broad religious 'agnosticism' just suits an immense number of people, and specially suits young persons. They are content to shovel aside all disputed points as rubbish, and if you charge them with indecision, they will tell you: 'I do not pretend to understand controversy; I decline to examine controverted points. I daresay it is all the same in the long run.'—Who does not know that such people

swarm and abound everywhere?

Now I do beseech all who read this paper to beware of this undecided state of mind in religion. It is a pestilence which walketh in darkness, and a destruction that killeth in noonday. It is a lazy, idle frame of soul which, doubtless, saves men the trouble of thought and investigation; but it is a frame of soul for which there is no warrant in the Bible, nor yet in the Articles or Prayer-book of the Church of England. For your own soul's sake, dare to make up your mind what you believe, and dare to have positive, distinct views of truth and error. Never, never be afraid to hold decided doctrinal opinions; and let no fear of man and no morbid dread of being thought party-spirited, narrow, or controversial, make you rest contented with a bloodless, boneless, tasteless, colourless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity.

Mark what I say. If you want to *do good* in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal religion. If you believe little, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology; by telling men roundly of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice; by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross, and

His precious blood; by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Saviour; by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit; by lifting up the brazen serpent; by telling men to look and live—to believe, repent, and be converted. This—this is the only teaching which for eighteen centuries God has honoured with success, and is honouring at the present day both at home and abroad. Let the clever advocates of a broad and undogmatic theology—the preachers of the Gospel of earnestness, and sincerity and cold morality—let them, I say, show us at this day any English village or parish, or city, or town, or district, which has been evangelized without ‘dogma,’ by their principles. They cannot do it, and they never will. Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless thing. It may be beautiful to some minds, but it is childless and barren. There is no getting over facts. The good that is done in the earth may be comparatively small. Evil may abound, and ignorant impatience may murmur and cry out that Christianity has failed. But, depend on it, if we want to “do good” and shake the world, we must fight with the old apostolic weapons, and stick to ‘dogma.’ No dogma, no fruits! No positive Evangelical doctrine, no evangelization!

Mark once more what I say. *The men who have done most for the Church of England*, and made the deepest mark on their day and generation, have always been men of most decided and distinct doctrinal views. It is the bold, decided, outspoken man, like Capel Molyneux, or our grand old Protestant champion Hugh McNeile, who makes a deep impression, and sets people thinking, and 'turns the world upside down.' It was 'dogma' in the apostolic ages which emptied the heathen temples and shook Greece and Rome. It was 'dogma' which awoke Christendom from its slumbers at the time of the Reformation and spoiled the Pope of one third of his subjects. It was 'dogma' which 100 years ago revived the Church of England in the days of Whitfield, Wesley, Venn, and Romaine, and blew up our dying Christianity into a burning flame. It is 'dogma' at this moment which gives power to every successful mission, whether at home or abroad. It is doctrine—doctrine, clear, ringing doctrine—which, like the ram's horns at Jericho, casts down the opposition of the devil and sin. Let us cling to decided doctrinal views, whatever some may please to say in these times, and we shall do well for ourselves, well for others, well for the Church of England, and well for Christ's cause in the world."