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"SIMPLE CONCERNING EVIL"

• EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

"... I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil." - Romans 16:19. (NKJV)

"... I should wish you to be experts in goodness, but simpletons in evil." (NEB)

"... I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil." (NIV)

"... I want you to be experts in good and innocents in evil" (Moffatt's Translation).

"... I want to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil." (Phillips' Translation).

"... I want you to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is bad." (WillHams' Translation).

"... I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil." (NASV).

I have heard it said, "If you have not tried it, then don't knock it". It suggests that without personal experience with a thing, one has no right to reject or criticize it. Many think they cannot make an unbiased choice between good and evil until they have fully explored both sides.

Counselors of the young often encourage them to experiment with various practices and philosophies. The idea being that they need experimental knowledge of all points of view and/or courses of action to make unbiased decisions about good and evil. How can they know things are good or evil unless they have first-

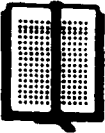
hand knowledge of them? This is playing with fire.

In the 50's, I told brother Roy Cogdill where I planned to attend college. His comment was simple and to the point. He said, "Ed, be careful that you don't learn a lot of things that are not so over there". It was his way of telling me that they were teaching a lot of things that I did not need to know. He was, in his own words, saying the same thing Paul said in our text.

Paul said he wanted Christians to be wise (sophisticated, skilled) in what is good, but wanted them to be simple concerning evil. Thayer says that simple means: "Of the mind, without admixture of evil, free from guile, innocent, simple". Christians do not learn to "discern both good and evil" by becoming more skilled in the doctrines of men. Nor do they become better prepared to combat sinful practices by becoming more intimately familiar with them. They increase their ability to "discern both good and evil" by becoming skilled in "the word of righteous". They become to full age as Christians with the ability to so discern by feeding upon and using the solid food of the word of righteousness. (Heb. 5:12-14). We have in Christ "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:12).

I could furnish a long list of men whose faith has been destroyed by their study of human philosophy and/or false religion. They intended to learn more

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about it so they could better combat it. Before they knew it, they were taken in by its appeal. They came out of their studies advocates of that which they had planned to combat. Others may still basically hold to the truth, but their opposition to human philosophies and false religion is much weaker.

It scares me to death when I see a young preacher's desk covered with books and papers from denominational writers. While one can hardly find a trace of literature from the brethren. It also scares me when I hear some young preacher bent on getting some religion or philosophy-oriented degree from some university. Unless one is exceptionally well-grounded in the truth he is exposing himself to dangers beyond imagination.

How can one know that a practice or doctrine is wrong without observing or experiencing it first-hand? It is simple. Fill one's mind with the holy scriptures. If it has to do with life and godliness the Bible teaches it. If the Bible authorizes it, it is right. If the Bible condemns it, either by name or in principle, it is wrong. One does not have to be thoroughly familiar with the thing in question to know that it is evil.

I have never seen an X-rated movie. I know enough about what the Bible teaches and what an X-rated movie is to know that a Christian should stay away from them. I have never been to a night club. I know enough about what goes on, without ever having been there, and enough about the Bible to tell brethren that they should avoid them.

One does not have to attend orgies to learn they are wrong. One does not have to learn all about Hindu rituals, first-hand, to criticize them. One does not have to have an intimate knowledge of any error to know it is wrong and to teach others so. If it is not in the Book, it is wrong (cf. Matt. 15:9).

Paul knew it was dangerous for simple (naive, unsuspecting) brethren to be exposed to the good (kind, smooth) words and fair speeches ("polished language" - Thayer) of those who teach doctrines contrary to divine revelation. So, such teachers needed to be marked ("to fix one's eyes upon, direct one's attention

to" - Thayer) and avoided.

Christians have enough incidental and unavoidable exposure to evil without going out of their way to expose themselves to it. One may think that his faith is strong enough to handle it. Or that his faith will be made stronger as a result of such exposure. In such cases one would do well to heed Paul's warning:

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." (1 Cor. 10:12-14).

There is a vast difference in a temptation that **overtakes one** and a temptation **one undertakes**. One may think he is strong enough to resist the appeal of sin and error. He may think he can fool around with idolatry without becoming an idolater. Paul says, don't be too sure: "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall". God is faithful to help those overtaken by a temptation - but has promised no help to those who expose themselves to temptation. "Therefore", he says, "my beloved, flee from idolatry." Flee means to avoid by flight.

No, I am not saying that a Christian should not investigate different views and practices from his own. I am not saying that one should reject outright another's views or practices with no knowledge at all of them. I am saying that one does not have to have first-hand and/or extensive knowledge to make a good decision. One can make the right choice without becoming wise (skilled, expert - Thayer) in that which he should reject and condemn.

In one sense, one should not be simple (naive) concerning evil. He needs to be well enough grounded in truth so that he can recognize error when he hears it and sin when he sees it. Yet, in another sense, one should be simple (inexperienced, unsophisticated) in evil. He should not unduly expose himself to it. He may not be as strong as he thinks.

WEDNESDAY MORNING CLASS

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"NOT ACCEPTING DELIVERANCE"

• JAMES W. ADAMS

In enumerating examples of those in Old Testament times who triumphed in the service of God "through faith", the writer of Hebrews mentions those who "were tortured" but did not "accept deliverance" (Heb. 11:35). We have expressions in modern parlance to describe persons who lack the courage and conviction to maintain their integrity in the face of opposition and persecution. We call them "traitors, cowards, rats, chicken" - all expressions of contempt. In World War II in occupied countries of Europe, many citizens took the easy way out by collaborating with their enemies. Among their fellow-countrymen, they were held in utter contempt. On the other hand, in all of those countries there were citizens who belonged to what they called "The Resistance". They refused to "accept deliverance" from their sufferings by collaboration. They would not compromise their convictions nor stultify their consciences even though in many cases it cost them their lives. These are the kind of people in the realm of the spiritual that the Hebrew writer speaks of when he describes them as "not accepting deliverance". They could have escaped torture and death by compromising or renouncing their faith, but they would not accept deliverance on such terms.

We greatly fear that in modern times all too many professed Christians despite superior advantages, do not have the faith of those worthies of ages past. Too many "take the easy way out". They "accept deliverance". To do this one does not have to renounce Jesus orally and vocally. There are many other subtler ways in which this can be done. In the area of doctrine, it can be done by compromising with the teachings of error or with unauthorized practices. In morals, it can be done by temperately indulging in sinful practices, by defending those who engage in them or by simply not taking an open and aggressive stand against them.

We see many parents who, while not indulging in worldly, sinful acts themselves, endorse, defend, or ignore them in their children. Social drinking, the wearing of immodest and sexually provocative clothing, mixed bathing, divorce and remarriage for unscriptural reasons, and obscene conversation are but a few of the things which may ignore and tolerate in order to "accept deliverance" from the "torture" (contempt and opposition) of our "liberated generation"(?).

It takes real faith in Christ to withstand successfully the pressures of our permissive
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society. The whole thrust of the press, radio, television, the movies, and popular literature, even our public educational institutions, is toward popularizing and making respectable and acceptable what is called "The New Morality". Really, there is nothing "new" about it, much less "moral". It is age-old vice in new clothing. We are bombarded constantly with advertising cliches designed to sell this species of camouflaged immorality. We hear much about "freedom of choice, life-style of consenting adults, the right to do one's own thing if it feels good, do it".

Those who oppose the so-called "new, liberated morality" are "tortured" by charges of "bigotry, intolerance, hate, judging, ignorant fundamentalism" and such like. Witness the recent judgement for damages handed down by a court and jury against an Oklahoma church of Christ because the elders of the church publicly withdrew fellowship from one of its members who persisted in continuing a relationship which violated clear, New Testament principles of morality. More than that, witness the "Media" cheering-section throughout the United States condemning the church for its action and praising the court's decision relative to the damage suit. Under such circumstances, it becomes very attractive and easy for many members of the church and congregations to "accept deliverance" by acquiescing or by becoming a part of the "silent majority" -- actually the blind, deaf, dumb, and frightened majority. This is but another way of describing the FAITHLESS MAJORITY! Do not allow modern

"liberals" deceive you into equating (by their contemptuous sneers at the "moral majority") true, New Testament morality or sound doctrine with a few, loud-mouthed fanatics and thus frighten you into silence.

WHEN IT'S THE OTHER FELLOW

Have you ever noticed?

When the other fellow acts a certain way, he is "ill-tempered"; when you do it, it's "nerves."

When the other fellow is set in his ways, he's "obstinate"; when you are it is just "firmness."

When the other fellow doesn't like your friends, he's "prejudiced"; when you don't like his, you are simply showing that you are a good judge of human nature.

When the other fellow tries to treat someone especially well, he is a "flatterer"; when you try the same thing you are using "tact."

When the other fellow takes time to do things, he is "dead slow"; when you do it, you are "deliberate."

When the other fellow spends a lot he is a "spendthrift"; when you do, you are "generous".

When the other fellow holds too tight to his money, he is "close"; when you do, you are "prudent."

When the other fellow says what he thinks, he is "spiteful"; when you do, you are "frank."

-Selected

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