

A LETTER ON TOLERATION

Dear (Re-united) Christian Brothers and Sisters,

These days we are being admonished to break fellowship with a consortium of Dutch “Brethren” who have come to differ with some of the classical Brethren interpretations of the Scriptures. We are further urged not to fellowship with any “Brethren” who continue to fellowship with them.

The fourteenth chapter of Romans admonishes Christians to tolerate non-essential differences among themselves:

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

(Romans 14:1 (NKJV)

The Scriptures provide us with two examples of the types of differences that were not to disrupt fellowship among Christians in this context:

1) *For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. (Romans 14:2)*

This issue was not simply vegetarianism versus eating meat! It was whether or not Christians were still under the dietary restrictions of the Law. Could they eat the meats sold in the Gentile markets without defiling themselves (*I Corinthians 10:25*), or should they be like Daniel, and only eat vegetables--so they would not chance defiling themselves by eating some “Unclean” meat (*Daniel 1:8-12*)?

2) *One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. (Romans 14:5)*

The issue was whether or not Christians were obligated to keep the Sabbath and the other holy days of the Jewish Law.

God had already definitively settled the issue of eating meats when he told Peter that He had cleansed the “Unclean” animals (*Acts 10:9-16*), and the Scriptures clearly denounce the observance of the Jewish holidays as a return to the weak and beggarly elements of the bondage of the Law (*Galatians 4:9-11*). But even though the real issue in both examples was as basic to Christianity as LAW versus GRACE, the Holy Spirit does not set the erring side straight in either case. The point was, that despite the fact that one side was Scripturally right and the other absolutely wrong, they were to receive each other without censure, rather than breaking fellowship over such issues.

It is true that Christians are to put wicked people out of their midst. (*I Corinthians 5:13*). Examples of the types of evil referred to include immorality, drunkenness, idolatry, &tc. (v. 11). Doctrinally evil people whose teachings “Overthrow the faith” (*II Timothy 2:18*) were to be treated similarly. But no charges of doctrines that challenge the fundamentals of Christianity have been leveled against the Dutch consortium, and we are specifically told that doctrines derogatory to the person of Christ are not involved.

Though I may not agree with much of what the Dutch consortium contends for, I see nothing in the charges leveled against them that is as fundamentally erroneous as the Law versus Grace issue in the Romans examples of differences among Christians that should not be considered grounds for breaking off Christian fellowship. While I do not object to a Scriptural campaign against any errors they may hold, I cannot conscientiously acquiesce in any conspiracy against them.

In Christ,

Bud Morris