

# Religious Controversy

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What about religious controversy? Is it proper to "argue" about religious questions? Some will always be around who thrive on argumentation and disputation, always spoiling for a fight with those who disagree with them. At the other end of the scale, and perhaps more pronounced now than ever, are those who feel there is no place for any argument or debate on religious issues. What shall we say about this matter as Christians? While reading from the pen of Alexander Campbell, "the sage of Bethany," I happened upon his discussion of this matter. After rehearsing the meekness of Moses, the zeal of Elijah, the patience of Job, the devotion of Paul, the benevolence of John, and the perfection of Jesus, Campbell reminds us that they were all rugged religious controversialists.

Campbell's explanation of the reason why religious controversy is not only permissible, but necessary, is very appropriate for us moderns:

If there was no error in principle or practice, then controversy, which is only another name for opposition to error, real or supposed, would be unnecessary. If it were lawful, or if it were benevolent to make a truce with error, then opposition to it would be both unjust and unkind.

If error were innocent and harmless, then we might permit it to find its own quietus, or to immortalize itself. But so long as it is confessed that error is more or less injurious to the welfare of society, individually and collectively considered, then no man can be considered benevolent who does not set his face against it. In proportion as a person is intelligent and benevolent, he will be controversial, if error exists around him. Hence the Prince of Peace never sheathed the sword of the Spirit while he lived. He drew it on the banks of the Jordan and threw the scabbard away (*Millennial Harbinger*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan. 4, 1830, p. 41).

It is a fact that the Scriptures warn us about engaging in foolish and ignorant questions that will cause vain strife (2 Tim. 2:23). It should be obvious, however, that not all religious issues are foolish or ignorant, nor do they all produce useless strife. I hereby cry out against the spirit of compromise or timidity, whichever it may be, that would silence a bold proclamation and defense of the Truth. Paul was "set for the defense of the gospel" (Phi. 1:16). Jude exhorts: "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3); so we must.

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