

What One Tolerates, the Next Accepts

John Wesley once wrote, "What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace." Both sacred and secular history have proven the truth of this assessment time and time again.

Everything from dancing to drinking, from abortion to mercy-killing, has gone from toleration to acceptance. In the home and in the church, everything from immodesty to immorality has been first allowed and then endorsed. Adulterous marriages, gambling, and other similar sins, have gone from being permitted to being sponsored. Remember when wearing shorts and attending dances were generally condemned as sinful? Now, in some places shorts are being worn to church services and dances are sometimes held in church buildings! Truly, "what one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace."

One generation tolerated sprinkling for baptism if a person were seriously ill. The next generation accepted sprinkling for baptism as an option for everyone. One generation approved a "head" elder. The next generation appointed some elders "bishops." One generation introduced instruments of music as an aid to poor singing. The next generation demanded we worship with instruments. One generation accepted the "fellowship hall" (which, at first, was just a few tables in the basement for social meals). The next generation built gymnasiums and "Family Life Centers." One generation apologized for "hard preachers" who opposed denominationalism. The next generation saw their sons and daughters joining those denominations. One generation spoke of the need to reach out in a "nonjudgmental" way to our Catholic and Protestant friends. The next generation welcomed Presbyterians into "our fellowship" with only a handshake. One generation spoke of congregational singing as "one of our traditions." The next generation defended choruses and choirs. One generation applauded preachers who closed their sermons without an appeal for sinners to be baptized for the remission of sins. The next generation denied the gospel plan of salvation in general and baptism in particular.

What does this say to us? What is our responsibility? "You shall observe to do therefore as the Lord... hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (Deut. 5:32). "Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (2 Tim. 3:14). "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). The next time we are tempted to deviate from the word of God, let us remember that what we tolerate, our children will embrace.

- by Mark White

No Fleshly Incentives

The use of fleshly incentives to draw people to worship services is becoming more and more common. One church offers free cokes, doughnuts, and balloons to its bus riders. Another offers a prize to the child who brings the most visitors. Still another uses some sports figure or entertainer to attract a crowd. Dinners and socials; elaborate church buildings; "Friendliest church in town" or "Fastest-growing church in town" advertising; the list of gimmicks is almost endless.

A study of 1 Corinthians, chapters 1 and 2, suggests that the people of our generation are not the first to demand fleshly incentives. The Jews and Greeks of Paul's day demanded them. "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22). Paul could have produced both, but he refused to do so: "But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:23-24).

Paul recognized the fact that some people are just not "convertible": "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1:26). Why are such infrequently called? Because the majority place their trust in the flesh rather than in God. They are fleshly-minded. And Paul was not about to coax fleshly-minded, "unconvertible" people "into the church" by the use of signs, wisdom, excellency of speech, enticing words, or any other fleshly incentive. To do so would result in getting their names on a "church roll," but not in bringing them to Christ to the saving of their souls.

If Paul refused to use signs and wisdom as fleshly incentives, what would have been his reaction to the use of cokes and doughnuts? If he came "not with excellence of speech or of

wisdom" (1 Cor 2:1), what would he have said concerning attempts to attract crowds through the use of sports figures and entertainers? If Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, followed a "no fleshly incentive" policy, should that not be our policy? And should we not always be able to say with Paul, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (2:2)?

- *by Bill Hall*

Do You "Hunger And Thirst After Righteousness?"

Jesus taught: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled" (Mt. 5:6). This verse describes an intense craving to be in a right relationship with God. The words that Jesus used here for "hunger" and "thirst" denote a level of intensity in desire that would be similar to the person who is about to starve to death, as versus a simple hunger pang; or a person about to die from dehydration, as versus someone who had a mild desire for something to drink.

Christians often wrestle with a number of problems that could be easily resolved in our minds and removed from our lives if we simply asked the question: "Am I hungering and thirsting for righteousness?" For instance, the supposedly hard questions about social drinking, smoking, dancing, movie and TV watching, immodest clothes, bad language, etc., all just vanish in the face of this test. If I desire to be right with God at the same level as a starving man desires food, it will be simple to answer these challenges and do the right thing.

Watch how neatly this divine principal works on the problem area of church attendance. Ask yourself, would a starving man pass up an opportunity to eat a good home cooked meal?" Answer: obviously not! Why? Because he is starving!! Now, would a Christian who "hungers and thirsts for righteousness" pass up an opportunity to meet and study with other saints - to worship God and study His Word? Answer: certainly not! Why? Because he craves to maintain a right relationship with God, and such assemblies aid tremendously in that direction. You can see the idea here -- and the challenge is to make the application in every area of your life. Think!

- *by Greg Gwin*