

Tolerating Black Shoes

I like brown shoes and wear them most of the time. However, if you insist upon wearing black shoes, I will not argue the point. Go right ahead! I'm a very tolerant man with respect to shoes.

But some of my friends tell me I am intolerant in religious matters. They just can't understand why a kindhearted, tolerant fellow like me would say that they *must* obey God's commands and practice in religion *only* that which God has authorized. (Well, maybe that is the way they put it.) Sometimes they find it difficult to tolerate my intolerance.

Some intolerance is born of egotism - the product of self-centered individuals who think they are the center of the universe, and that their ways must be accepted by all. This is very bad (Jas. 4:11-12).

And there is an intolerance of sort, which is born of love. I love my granddaughter and insist that she not eat the shoe polish (the brown, that is). I can't bring myself to be unconcerned about this matter.

And there is an intolerance born of respect for authority and deep concern for those who fail to respect the divine will. Paul contended with the Israelites frequently because (a) he loved them, and (b) he knew they could not be saved while they followed their own erroneous ways. Paul's convictions, and his concern for men, made him seem intolerant (Rom. 10:1ff).

People who really *believe* something - strongly enough to work for it, teach it, and practice it - are often called "narrow" or "bigoted." Meanwhile, the shallow-thinking, crowd-following, spineless fellow is likely to mistake his own lack of conviction for broadmindedness and congratulate himself for being such a wonderful person.

It is well and good to be tolerant in matters of indifference - where the rights of men are equal. But to tolerate sin and transgression of God's law is to assume the right to judge that law (Jas. 2:9ff), or to relegate divine matters to the category of black and brown shoes.

In the final analysis, tolerance is often a disguise for the lack of conviction and concern. In their liberal attitude toward shoe colors, men forget to prepare for a robe and a crown.

- by Robert F. Turner

Seed and Soil

The productivity of seed is directly proportionate to the fertility of soil. It matters not how good the seed is, if it is planted in bad soil; either it will not germinate or, having germinated, it will produce a sickly plant. So it is with the word of God and human hearts.

In the parable of "The Sower," stress is laid, not on the power of the seed, but, on the kind of soil in which it is sown. Four kinds of soil are mentioned in which the seed is sown -- the wayside, rocky places, soil in which thorns are abundant, and good soil (Lk. 8:1-15; Matt. 13:1-23). Each of these represents four different kinds of human hearts, while the seed is called "the word of God" (Lk. 8:11).

The deficiencies of the first three kinds of soil do not, in any way, cast reflection upon the power of the seed to produce life. The problem is in the soil and not in the seed. Neither should men speak of the word of God as powerless to convert men -- the potential to produce new life and to change men is found in the word of God (see Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 1:22-25). So why doesn't it always bring forth an abundant harvest? -- because the soil, the human heart, is not receptive or it is encumbered with the cares of the world. So, let's not blame God for our lack of productivity -- the kind of soil we are has been our choice.

What are the ingredients of fertile soil? Jesus defines it thusly: "... they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Lk. 8:15). I believe there are still human beings with good hearts that want the word of God. Is your soil good?

- by Jim R. Everett

He Being Dead Yet Speaketh

Concerning Abel, the Hebrew writer said, "*he being dead yet speaketh*" (11:4). This, of course, is a reference to the fact that Abel's example of faith and obedience continued to serve as

a lesson to others long, long after his death – continuing even to those of us living today.

While none of us will ever attain to the reputation of Abel, it is still true that our example – for good or bad – will endure after we are dead. Think about that for a moment: what will your life, your work, your service to God say about you when you are dead and gone? Here are some possible outcomes – some things your example might ‘say’ after your death:

- ‘He never really put God first in his life. For him, it was all about his work, his career, the accumulation of material things. When he died he had a huge bank account, lots of investments, a big house, etc. But, as they say, you can’t take it with you . . .’
- ‘She was all about appearances. She spent lots of time and money making sure that she had the latest fashions and the best of accessories. She really looked nice. But, you know, in the end she only wore one dress to her funeral . . .’
- ‘He loved to hunt and fish, to go camping, play golf, etc. He had all the top-of-the-line equipment. And, oh yes, he’d frequently miss worship services to engage in his recreational pursuits – even got his golf ‘handicap’ down in the single digits. But, I heard they sold all of his gear for pennies-on-the-dollar when he was gone . . .’
- ‘She didn’t like it when the preacher delivered strong doctrinal sermons from the pulpit. Her constant complaint was that this sort of preaching would ‘drive folks away.’ Sad to say, but none of the folks she was so concerned about offending even showed up at her funeral.’

We could go on, but you get the point. Is this how you want to be remembered after your death? It would be far better if it were said:

- ‘He loved God, and his life showed it. He would forego anything in order to put the Lord first. Career, money, possessions, recreation, the admiration of worldly minded people, etc. – none of that compared in importance to serving faithfully in Christ’s kingdom. He sure set a great example, and he will not soon be forgotten.’

- by Greg Gwin