

Moderation?

Ponder: What does it really mean to be a moderate?

Scripture: “they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11, NKJV).

Liberal or conservative? Right or left? Up or down? Yes or no? In some cases, choices like these are legitimate; but at other times the best course lies between extremes. I don't eat raw meat, but I don't want it incinerated either!

While Saul of Tarsus was an extreme Pharisee, his mentor, Gamaliel, was comparatively moderate. What we know of Gamaliel from Scripture comes mostly from Acts 5:34-40. The apostles were on trial for disobeying the Sanhedrin's orders to stop preaching the gospel of Christ. While we applaud Gamaliel for keeping the Sanhedrin from murdering the apostles, his reasoning leaves much to be desired.

Gamaliel reminded the Sanhedrin of two “Messiah wannabes,” Theudas, and Judas of Galilee, both of whose efforts had failed. From those two cases, he concluded that if what the apostles were doing was merely another work of men, it, too, would come to nothing; but if it was of God, then the Sanhedrin would be fighting against God by opposing them.

On first reading that might sound good, but think with me! Does numerical growth and longevity really show that a religious movement is approved by God, and isn't just a work of man? If so, then God must approve of quite a number of religions that deny Jesus and reject the Bible; after all, they have been around for centuries and have millions of adherents. Surely no informed Christian would accept this!

Instead of saying, “keep away from these men and let them alone” (Acts 5:38), I wish Gamaliel had adopted the course of the noble Bereans in Acts 17:11. He could have recommended to the Sanhedrin, “Let us give these men a fair hearing and keep an open mind; when we have listened to what they are saying, we should go and examine the Scriptures to see if it is true.”

Truth is determined by what the Scriptures say, not by whether a religious movement endures and grows. Let us be neither closed-minded nor gullible. Listen with an open mind, and examine the Scriptures. Now that's true moderation.

Song: “How Precious Is The Book Divine”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in our weakness we are inclined to go to extremes. Please help us not to act rashly, but to listen with an open mind, and yet to examine everything by the standard of Your word, accepting only that which is in harmony with Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.