



Upon High
Places

Fanaticism or Faithfulness

Message for March 2018 - 4

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY Seventh-Day Adventist Church Reform Movement

YOUTH DEPARTMENT OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

Dear Youth:

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ and ask that His blessings, love, and direction may abound with you.

A universal error

This month we will meditate upon the text of Acts 5:29: “... ***We ought to obey God rather than men.***”

Have you ever been called fanatical? Surely if you want to live your faith with fidelity you will hear this word on occasion. It is easy to confuse fanaticism with faithfulness to God. Today, he is quickly labeled a fanatic who refuses to live according to the majority or who has different customs and ideas. Is this really fanaticism? According to the dictionary fanaticism is an “overenthusiasm or excessive passion for a belief, idea, doctrine or opinion,” especially amongst religious circles. The problem is that too easily one falls into the pretense of attaching the moniker of fanatic to those who are not. Where is the limit of the “excessive passion of a belief?” Is not this something very subjective to evaluate?

Forms of fanaticism

Nowadays it is easy to confuse fanaticism with fidelity, because the media, politics, and even religious organizations have been determined to present terrorists or religious extremists as fanatics who rage against the system and seek to impose their opinions at the cost of killing anyone who opposes them. Thus, a person who wishes to live his faith freely and authentically will easily be treated as a fanatic, because he will be opposed to the majority's wishes. It is also true that there is a tendency to treat those who are ill understood or whose customs and ideas are unknown as fanatics.

For example, a group of people go to a river, several enter the water with long gowns, someone submerges them in the water—it is biblical baptism—but the people who observe the event and are not used to it and remark: “A group of fanatics.” The truth is that most do not have a definite set of ideas to which they hold faithful, but they are willing to let themselves be taken away, to be confused amongst the masses. They do not mind doing this or that as long as they are left alone. In this way, when someone manifests that he has concrete beliefs based on the Bible and is capable of defending them and even risking his friendships, work, reputation, and even physical integrity, he is considered a radical fanatic.

In reality, is wanting to be faithful to personal convictions fanaticism, especially when based on the Word of God? No, but for the majority, if this attitude leads to placing something at risk, or to separate us from something or someone, then it is fanaticism. For example, one can believe that the Sabbath is the Lord's day, according to the Bible, but if by this conviction, he rejects a well-paid job, if he needs it, this would be fanaticism; or he refuses to take an exam on Saturday during his university studies or does not go to a party that the school organizes in a nightclub where they go to dance, drink, etc.

This has led the so-called Christian churches to “adapt” their faith to the times and circumstances. If modern society dresses in immoral attire, the church copies this custom and avoids being branded as “fanatical” by the people. The general feeling is this: you can believe what you want, but you cannot take your beliefs to the extreme. And what is the extreme? Well, these ideas mold your life and direct it. For example, some friends at work invite you to go out, they meet up with some ladies and decide to go dancing, but you prefer to go home rather than offend Go. They will surely look at you like a “weirdo”; like a fanatic. If you are invited to a family member's Saturday wedding and you kindly refuse so as to not break the commandment, that will probably be thought of as fanaticism, because you have put a personal idea before the majority's feelings (something that is considered socially normal and important).

The non-fanatic would be the one who "adapts" to all the situations because he does not want to produce any maladjustment or discomfort in the group. I have acquaintances like this: “I went because I did not want to lose face with the people.”

In our days the idea of adapting to everything—of accepting everything with ease and not being a fan of any idea—is promulgated. For example, if one speaks of homosexuality one cannot oppose it. We must accept it as natural, lawful, legal, normal. Opposing, then, would be considered fanaticism. The problem is that the tendency of our modern and democratic societies is to go to the extreme of censoring and even marking as undesirable those who do not accept the idea that this sexual orientation is good because it is not God's will (1 Corinthians 6: 9-10). What shall we say if a law allowing sexual intercourse with animals, clearly prohibited in the Word of God, is approved in our country (Leviticus 18:23)? A Christian must distinguish himself by respecting the laws of his country, for being an exemplary citizen, but the laws must also protect religious liberties and minorities.

If the majority embraces an idea, there will be a tendency to brand the minority that refuses to embrace it as fanatics. This is the view of our society and will soon be something accepted worldwide. The real problem will begin when one reaches the point of persecuting someone for their religious convictions, as happened during the period of the “Holy Inquisition.”

Biblical faithfulness or fanaticism

A Christian is one who considers Christ his Master, Guide, Model and personal inspiration, who wants to follow him and proclaim to the world as Savior. The Bible presents two classes of Christians: The faithful and infidels. The faithful are those who wish to live fully in Christ (2 Timothy 3:12). Another version says: “Everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ and wants to live dedicated to God (Word of God for All).” Jesus said: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Matthew 16:24. Somewhere else it is taught: “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” James 4:4.

“Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock...” Luke 6:47. We see from these texts that a genuine Christian is one who wants to live like Christ. What is the natural result of this at all times? “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” 2 Timothy 3:12.

Daniel and his companions were taken to Babylon as captives; they were of royal blood and the king chose them to be part of their particular service. The first test they encountered was the eating and drinking of the monarch's food, but this meal included alcoholic beverages, meat, and other delicacies dedicated to idols. Daniel proposed in his heart not to contaminate himself (Daniel 1:8).

What did this position entail? Danger of death. The king could react perniciously and sentence those who refused to do what he had ordered to death. The chief of the captives told Daniel that he feared for their lives and also his own if they sought out to do as they had spoken (Daniel 1:10). The

other captives had no problems, but Daniel and his companions did. "Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink." Daniel 1:12. They had to do a test for ten days. The faith of Daniel and his companions was great and God rewarded him because there were no others like them in terms of intellect and acuity. How would the position of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah be considered in our time? Fanatics? Surely! Why do that nonsense? Why risk life uselessly when the king was giving them that great opportunity and privilege? Why take things to the extreme?

With the passing of time there was a royal decree. Every man of Babylon was to kneel down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had erected in a valley. What did Daniel's three companions decide? "Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Daniel 3:18.

There was a death penalty for the disobedient. It was dangerous to oppose the decree of the king, but these young men concluded that they could not violate the second commandment of God's law even if it meant death (Exodus 20: 4-6). The king condemned them to die, but God delivered them. Fanaticism or faithfulness? What opinion would this attitude deserve in our days? How easy it would have been to kneel and covertly pretend that they were worshiping the image, but in reality, their thoughts were focused on God! This would not have been faithfulness in the strict sense of the word, but hypocrisy, cowardice, deceit, and betrayal of their sacred vows.

Many Christian churches teach that in similar situations it is best to compromise and do what one is told, although in the mind one can have other thoughts. "I prostrate, but I am worshiping the true God and not that image." I make an outward show of something that I do not believe in to save my life. I lead others to understand something that is not the truth to avoid the consequences. This is a difficult issue, but let's analyze with the Word of God and not with our feelings, emotions, and preconceptions.

If someone asks us to kill others in a war with the penalty of disobedience being arrest and death, but we refuse to do so because the sixth commandment says: "You shall not kill," is it fanaticism or loyalty? Dear youth, what do you think? This issue is very easy to analyze from a comfortable life and without having to face these extreme situations, but do we really have it clear in our mind? Do we know what we should do with the help of the Lord in these situations or similar situations in which the law of God is at stake? I am not talking about exposing ourselves unnecessarily, of provoking others, of attacking and discrediting those who do not think like us (that we should not do), but of what position to take in case we are told to sin.

The apostles, when urged to do something contrary to their convictions, said: "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." Acts 4:19.

This was the case with the first Christians who, for refusing to deposit a few ashes at the feet of the idols, were taken to the Roman circuses to be torn to pieces by the beasts. The Waldenses were persecuted for their convictions and many of them died as martyrs. So it was with other minority groups: the Protestant reformers who in their time had to face the scaffold and the stake, with the Christians who opposed to participate in the two world wars or in the wars of their countries, and for that reason they were arrested, punished and many paid with their lives.

Today it is relatively easy to live the faith, but we always have to face opposition, mockery, pointing fingers, taking a different meal to school, dressing differently, having a different day of rest, refusing to participate in worldly parties, not thinking like most in certain matters such as sexual relations before marriage, homosexuality, abortion, etc. The weak do not resist this pressure and allow themselves to be swayed by the majority. Only by the grace of Christ can we remain faithful.

So shall it be in the future when a false day of rest is imposed via worldwide decree in place of the Sabbath. What will we do when we are prohibited from buying or selling? What will we do when we are threatened with being deprived of freedom or our property? Now is the time to prepare ourselves by being faithful in small trials, in order to resist the coming trial. The Lord is more willing to help us than we can imagine, we need only place ourselves in His hands.

“The Lord of heaven permits the world to choose whom they will have as ruler.... Every human being must take sides, either for the true and living God, who has given to the world the memorial of Creation in the seventh-day Sabbath, or for a false Sabbath, instituted by men who have exalted themselves above all that is called God or that is worshiped, who have taken upon themselves the attributes of Satan, in oppressing the loyal and true who keep the commandments of God. This persecuting power will compel the worship of the beast by insisting on the observance of the Sabbath he has instituted.” Selected Messages, Book 3, pg. 424.

Dear youth, I encourage you to be faithful. The Lord has promised to help those who love Him, honor them, guide them, and bless them. What do you think about that? Write me if you have questions at: youth@sda1844.org. May the Lord bless you richly and fulfill His word in you: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Revelation 2:10. Amen.

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