

The Inalienable Right of the Ignorant

“And if any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant . . .” I Cor. 14:38

Man was made in the image of God. We are not robots or puppets, we are decision makers. We even have the right to be wrong. We can eat forbidden fruit as did Adam and Eve. We can betray Jesus like Judas. We can murmur, complain, and speak great swelling words of vanity against the Sovereign of the Universe.

God, of course, can take care of such rebellious people. He has the power to deliver the godly out of temptation, and reserve the unjust for punishment. (II Pet. 2:9.) In the meanwhile, however, He has given instructions to the church. We have an obligation to our fellow Christians. If they commit fornication, we are to deliver them to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that their spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 5:5.) If they are “disorderly” and do not work, we are to “withdraw from them (II Thess. 3:6.) If they cause divisions, they are to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17.) If they are heretics, they are to be warned twice and rejected (Tit. 3:10.) If they are only ignorant, however, they are to be politely left alone.

Someone once said: “I would rather keep my mouth shut and let people think I am ignorant, than to open it up and remove all doubt.” Such persons usually have a rather benign influence on others. They quite often come to church and cause no trouble. They usually select a back pew or balcony seat and quietly wait for the benediction. As long as they are allowed to be ignorant, they do not break furniture, shout obscenities, or divide the church. Should they suffer a brain ache, or mental charlie horse, however, all bets are off. Paul dealt with such people at Corinth. He reminded them, that if any man thought himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, he was to acknowledge that the things which he wrote were commandments of the Lord. If any one, however, deliberately chose to be ignorant, Paul recommended that they be allowed to remain ignorant.

We must emphasize, of course, that God doesn’t want us to be ignorant. He wants us to be wise concerning that which is good, and simple concerning that which is evil (Rom. 16:19.) We should not be ignorant of the devil’s devices (II Cor. 2:11.) We should not be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep (I Thess. 4:13.) We should not be in darkness about the Day of His return (I Thess. 5:1-2.) But if any man makes a deliberate decision to be ignorant, even God will not intervene!

It would indeed be wonderful if the world was filled with logical and literate people with a great desire to learn. Such, however, is not the case, and never will be. Just as there will always be the poor, there will also always be the ignorant. If we instruct them with meekness, God may give them repentance (II Tim. 2:25.) If we treat them with love they may grow up to the place where they want to learn. If they do not grow up, however, don’t stir them up to some work of the flesh, let them be ignorant.

It is inevitable that some seed will fall on rocky soil. Perhaps you have heard of the man who only combed his hair twice a year because it was so painful. Some people seldom think for the same reason. Should these people confess Christ and be baptized, that may represent the apex of their spiritual growth and development. God may ultimately choose to reject them for being barren and unfruitful. That, however, is His decision, not ours. We certainly should have compassion on the ignorant (Heb. 5:2.) We should be longsuffering toward all (I Thess. 5:14) But if any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant!

Almost everyone has heard of a church that divided over some trivial matter like the size of a classroom, or the color of a carpet. Such divisions are a testament to what ignorant people can do when they get angry. We may be well advised to leave them alone. Let them be ignorant. Let them sleep on and take their rest.

Not everyone, of course, need be left in ignorance. Some can be provoked to love and good works. Others can be raised from the dead like Lazarus. Yet it is both Scriptural and practical to leave some people to their ignorance. May God give you the wisdom to apply His words: **“If any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant!”**

