

Studying Error to Learn Truth

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We lately read a list of the qualifications of a minister of the Gospel, among which was this, that "he should be well abreast of the latest destructive Biblical criticism, so as to refute its arguments." The idea that in order to refute error men must study it is altogether too common. It shows itself in the idea that in order to avoid evil, men must go where it is, and learn all about it.

If people reasoned the same way with regard to food, everybody would soon die. If they thought that in order to be able to detect poison, and guard their children from it, they must taste all the poisons that are known, the fallacy would soon be exposed. There are very few men, comparatively, who know all about poisons. What do the people do who are ignorant of poisons? - Why, they sensibly determine to taste nothing, which they do not know to be wholesome, and thus they escape all danger.

Some parents make the mistake of warning their children against all sorts of evil, so that they may be able to avoid it. This is well illustrated by the following. A mother called out to her son, "Tom, are you teaching that parrot to swear?" The reply was, "No, I am just teaching it what words it must not say." Of course those would be the very words that the parrot would use. And so it is with children. If they are told all about the evil that is in the world, they will be sure to try it. Let their minds be filled with that which is good, and they will have less tendency to follow the evil. Then when they see or hear of evil practices or teachings, they will be able at once to detect the evil by its contrast with the truth and the good with which they are familiar.

The person, who sets himself the task of studying all the forms of error, has an endless task before him. The result will be that he will never get to the study of truth. The minister, who studies the works of infidels, and of the destructive critics of the Bible, will be apt to feed the flock on the driest kind of husks. The carpenter does not try to find all the crooked sticks in the world, so that he may recognize a crook when he sees it, but he simply learns the use of the square, and then he can in a moment tell whether or not a stick is straight.

The inspired advice of the apostle Paul should be heeded by all: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." 2 Timothy 3.14. Stick to the truth; with error we need have nothing to do.