

ED KING COLLECTION - Box: 1, FOLDER 25  
Church '58

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Text: Galatians 5:13 "Ye have been called unto liberty, but use not your liberty as an occasion to the flesh; but in love serve one another."

I do not wish this morning to make any reference to the recent unfortunate events at Millsaps College. I shall go on giving that wonderful college my full support.

We are in for a long controversy over segregation. It is a vital issue, especially in sections of the country where the colored population is heavy. There will be people on both sides of the debate who will become acrimonious. They will be tempted to substitute emotion for reason and in bitterness of spirit rend the fabric of Christian fellowship and trample freedom of expression under foot. Therefore, it is in order for us to keep certain points in mind.

#### Point Number One:

We must grant to our opponents the same freedom we demand for ourselves. A great French writer once said, "I do not believe a word he says but I will defend his right to say it to the last ditch." That is the very essence of liberty. That is the golden rule applied to debate on vital matters. There must be room in the church for the liberal and the conservative, for the integrationist and the segregationist. A man honestly trying to follow Christ as Lord must be welcome in the church and his right to dissent from the prevailing opinion in the church, or the community, must be safeguarded. We must preserve in the church the climate of freedom. There must be room for all shades of opinion. We must bear in mind the spirit of Whittier's words:

"The saints, who twain in faith,  
In love agree;  
And melt not in an acid test  
The Christian pearl of charity."

"The Christian pearl of charity" must not be melted in the acids of controversy. We have a right to differ on vital matters; we have no right to disrupt the fellowship of the church. The debate must be carried on in the spirit of mutual respect and love.

A few months ago I went to Sun Valley, Idaho to make a speech to a Convocation of Royal Arch Masons. On the way home I stopped in Kansas City for a day to see some old friends. I talked there with a good friend who is the distinguished pastor of one of our churches. The conversation finally drifted to the topic of segregation. He said that the schools should be integrated at once all over America. He sincerely believes that justice and right demand it. I told him that I could not share his views. I told him I thought it would be tragic for both races in the deep South to put black and white children in the same school. I told him that we have to take the ethical teachings of Jesus—the brotherhood of man, the inestimable value of every man in the sight of God, the golden rule—and formulate policies to apply these principles to the actualities of life in each locality. I told him that in my judgment the best policy for the good of all concerned would be to work on the basis of separate but equal educational opportunities. I told him that policy seemed to me to be the only one that could be worked with harmony and peace in my section of the country. We differed radically on our views on integration. Shall I say that he has no place in the church because he does not see eye-to-eye with me? We disagree. Surely we are Christian enough to disagree without being disagreeable!

But somebody says, "Now, wait a minute. These are vital affairs. They affect our whole pattern of life. In such vital matters we cannot afford let both sides have an equal hearing. The end justifies the means. The preservation of our way of life is so important that we are justified in suppressing, if we can, all opposing views." But that is fallacious. The end never justifies the means. If freedom is

# The Climate of Freedom

A SERMON BY DR. W. B. SELAH  
DELIVERED AT GALLOWAY MEMORIAL  
METHODIST CHURCH

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Broadcast—W. S. L. I.

(Editor's Note: Many requests have come to the Advocate to share this message with our readers).



suppressed, no matter who wins the controversy, we have all lost our most precious possession. When the Communists gained control of Russia in 1917 they suppressed freedom. Asked why his party used dictatorial methods to further the cause of Communism, Lenin replied that the end justifies the means—that when Communism was established firmly in Russia the apparatus of dictatorship would "wither away." Forty years have gone by. Communism is now firmly rooted in Russia. Would you say that dictatorship has "withered away?" The end never justifies the means. You cannot fight fire with fire. Or, to put it in other words—the best way to get rid of the darkness is not to curse it. The only way to get rid of it is to turn on the light. If by threat or intimidation we seek to silence our opponents we are aping the Communists. No cause, however worthy, can win by dictatorial methods. So, my friends, in this vital controversy let us contend earnestly for our beliefs and allow our neighbors the same privilege.

#### Point Number Two:

The freedom of the pulpit must be maintained. I have been your pastor for thirteen years. Nobody in or out of the church has ever attempted to tell me what to say or what not to say. I am sure that I have said many things with which some of you disagreed. But you have wanted me to state my convictions. For this I am grateful. But in some churches the freedom of the pulpit may not be so highly prized. There was a time when heretics—those who did not conform to the prevailing view—were burned. Now they are sometimes fired. A church has a right to get rid of its preacher for any reason—even such a trivial reason as the way he uses gestures. But a church should think twice before letting an honest minister go just because he holds convictions that the laymen do not share. So long as a minister is loyal to Christ, he should be encouraged to state

his honest convictions on vital matters. Every church by its attitude should say in substance to its minister, "We stand for a free pulpit and a free church. We do not expect our minister to echo the opinions of the congregation. We may not agree with all he says, but we desire him to speak his convictions." Such an attitude will create an atmosphere in which reason has a chance to prevail.

Of course, a minister must not abuse this freedom. He must give a reason for his convictions. He must not be dogmatic. He must remember that no man, not even a minister, is infallible. He must be able to appreciate the point of view of good men who do not see eye-to-eye with him. He ought to speak in love. He will not be effective unless he does speak with reason—and with love for all his people.

A young minister, fresh out of seminary and burning with a desire to change the world before breakfast, went into his pulpit and proceeded with great glee to tomahawk what he conceived to be the belated views of his people on matters of theology and social action. He did not last long in that pulpit. Were his people unreasonable and stubborn? I think not. He was foolish. He had not learned that you cannot open minds by cracking skulls. He had not learned that most laymen are reasonable men. They will not be bludgeoned into new conceptions. They are willing to be lead into them by a man who respects and loves them and who can present his case with reason. The Protestant minister is not a pulpit dictator whose attitude is—"I am Sir Oracle, and when I open my lips, let no dog bark." He is one little man speaking in love to his friends on vital matters. And his friends will listen and then make up their own minds. There is a liberty of hearing as well as of speaking. Every layman ought to ask himself this question—In what spirit do I listen? Will I listen in the spirit of brotherliness or in the spirit of bitterness? If in bitterness, he may stand condemned, at the bar of his own conscience, for having a closed mind. If in brotherliness, he may learn some new truth to enrich his life. Most men will listen to a trusted minister, sift his arguments, weigh his reasons; and then come to their own conclusions.

#### Point Number Three:

Let us quit calling our opponents names. Good, honest men differ on important matters; name calling is unbecoming. As some one has said, "Labels are libels." You cannot make converts to your view by pinning labels on people. To call a man a name is not to win an argument; it is to indulge in rude conduct. Some people have called integrationists communists. That is not true. Most people who believe in integration are good Americans and good Christians. Some people have called segregationists unchristian and undemocratic. That is not true. Most people who believe in segregation are good Americans and good Christians.

Several years ago a certain member of this church addressed a letter to my bishop and to the chairman of our Official Board, saying that I was either a coward or a communist. He was angry, I think, because I had not gone into the pulpit and stated his particular view of race relations. His letter was not clear at this point. He was very clear in saying that I should be moved. Am I a coward? You answer that question. Am I a communist? I am not. My wife says that I get most belligerent when I am castigating Communism. Communism has no place for God. I believe in God. Communism is an economic theory that places the means of production in the hands of the state; I believe in the free enterprise system. Communism is a tyranny that suppresses liberty; I believe in democracy and in freedom. I cite this case not to affirm my stand against Communism. You know where I stand in these vital matters.

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I cite it to illustrate the point that name calling does no good. I was not moved. You wanted me to stay on and "paint the thing as I see it" for the God of truth and right. Let us not indulge in name calling.

**Point Number Four:**

In this controversy over race relations, only reason and love will win in the long run. They are the only weapons a Christian can use in this or any other controversy.

Force in any form—threats, intimidation, coercion—has not the ghost of a chance of winning. Force may win a skirmish but it will lose the long war. The early church was persecuted by the mob and by the Roman Empire. Many Christians were slain. Force won a temporary victory. Christianity had to become for a while an underground movement. But the church, using only reason and love, won the long struggle. "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church." Violence and intimidation cannot win the final victory. Twenty five years ago, the Ku Klux Klan sought to intimidate the Roman Catholic church in sections of America. It tried to stir up hatred against Catholicism. Its efforts only succeeded in winning friends for the Catholic church and causing Catholics to rally more devotedly to their church. Force always fails; reason and love succeed, for they appeal to the decency in every man.

No vital matter in human history has ever been decided by persecution. Three hundred years ago Galileo said that the world moves. This was considered heresy by the leaders of the church of that day. They believed that the earth is stationary. They had a text which they thought substantiated their belief. "Thou hast established the earth; and it stands fast. (Psalm 119:90). Galileo was forced on threat of death to recant the heresy of the movement of the earth. Tradition says that as he left the room after his recantation he whispered to one of his students, "She does move." Why did he recant? Perhaps he did it in order to have more time to carry on his scientific experiments. Anyway, one thing is certain—the church that condemned him now believes that the earth moves. The question of the earth's movement was not solved by putting pressure on the great scientist. It was solved by reason, verified by astronomical observation. In the long run every question will be solved by reason. For reason is the only weapon that can win.

No vital issue can be settled properly in an atmosphere of emotion. Emotions becloud the issue, preventing men from carefully surveying all facets of the problem. Emotions generate heat. What we need is less heat and more light. Too many people in the controversy are like the preacher who punctuated every point of his discourse by pounding the pulpit. It was said of him that he could get more dust out of the pulpit than light out of the text. In this controversy the Biblical injunction should be taken to heart—"Come, let us reason together," said the Lord. Sound and fury cannot win; only reason can win. Let us create an atmosphere in which reason can do her perfect work and men can hear the call of God to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly.

**Point Number Five:**

You can trust most people to make the right decisions if they are not put under pressure and if they are permitted to see every angle of a problem. In a democracy, you have to trust the people; for they are the court of last resort. Give truth and falsehood a fair field and in the end most men will choose the truth. Let them look at a problem long enough, let them hear all views of the matter, let them have time to put aside their own prejudices and still the clamor of emotions—and they will do that which is right and just. Or, to put it bluntly—they can be trusted to know the difference between hay and haywire.

This democratic process is seen in the jury

system which goes back in Anglo-Saxon history to Runnymede in 1215 when the English barons wrested Magna Charta from King John. The jury system of arriving at justice is based on the proposition that the average man can be trusted to find the truth. Before the twelve men in the jury box the lawyers present evidence; witnesses give their testimony; the judge, versed in the law, gives an opinion to guide the jurors; then they retire to the jury room to deliberate and arrive at a verdict. Sometimes a jury condemns an innocent person to prison or to death. Sometimes a jury lets a guilty man go free. The system is not infallible. (Nothing in this universe is infallible except God). But it is the best method yet devised for establishing justice. And it is based on the idea that, given time to deliberate calmly, men can be trusted to distinguish between hay and haywire.

We believe in the freedom of the press. That means the presentation of different points of view by different papers and sometimes by different men on the same paper. We read, sift arguments, weigh facts; and then make up our own minds on all matters. This freedom of the press is predicated on the idea that man, if given a chance to know all the facts, will come to right conclusions.

Much has been said of late about academic freedom. It must be preserved. A teacher should be careful not to seek to lead a student to his own point of view. A good teacher will present, without bias, all points of view. He will encourage his students to read books that deal with all angles of the subject. Above all, he will remember that the function of a college is not to tell students what to think, but to train them in the art of thinking. He will not seek by clever methods to foist his own conclusions upon them. In his task he must have wide latitude. If he is an instructor in a Christian college, he will be honor bound not to seek to make atheists or Mohammedans of his students. But he will let them know the arguments of the atheists and set over against them the arguments for theism. He will certainly let them become acquainted with the history of Mohammedanism and set over against it the story of the Christian movement. Within the framework of loyalty to God as revealed in Christ, he can be given freedom without fear of disastrous results. It is exceedingly difficult to indoctrinate college students. By the time they arrive at college most of them have a mental set. I taught English once. (You can scarcely tell it at times when you hear me speak. When the English language gets in the way of my speaking it is just too bad for the English language.) I know how difficult it is to change the habits of speech of a youth who has been brought up in a home where precise English was not used. There is a story about a certain lad who learned to say "ain't" at home. All year long the teacher tried to break him of the habit. But on the final examination he wrote, "There ain't no such word as ain't." It is exceedingly hard to indoctrinate some people.

For thirteen years I have been preaching Christian love in this pulpit. My sermons have not been very effective with some people. Just recently I talked with a member of this congregation who said that he despised his wife's relatives. This man listened to my preaching but was not indoctrinated.

Let us create a climate of freedom and people will make up their own minds.

**Point Number Six:**

The Christian's supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ. We are under moral obligations to follow the highest and best we know. Christ is the best we know. He is the fairest among ten thousand, the one altogether lovely. He is for the Christian the final revelation of the will of God. In His principles we find a pattern upon which we seek to build. In His spirit we find the attitudes toward God and

man that should characterize our conduct. Conscience tells all men that they ought to do right. Christ tells us what the right is. In every situation we ask one question—what would He have us to do?

Because our supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ, we will lend every man our ear, but only God our conscience. We will not give our conscience to the government - national or state. We will obey the laws of the nation and state. If we think those laws are unjust we will protest them and seek to get them modified or repealed. But our consciences belong to no government; they belong to God in Christ.

A few years ago a majority of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist church issued a statement, commending the Supreme Court's decision and urging all Methodists to give it support. We listened carefully to the admonition of these honored men, but we made up our own minds about the matter.

We will give every group—or individual—in the church our ear; we will reach our own conclusions. Our consciences belong to God.

What applies to groups inside the church applies also to groups outside the church. Any group outside the church has a right to advocate any cause, provided it does not seek to intimidate or coerce. We will listen to what it says, and make up our own minds. We will lend all men our ears; our consciences belong to God.

In the long run it will be found that the church is the last bulwark of freedom. When Dr. Albert Einstein, whose work in mathematics helped to make possible the atomic age, came to this country as a refugee from Nazi Germany, he was asked about freedom in Germany. In reply he said in substance: I thought that the great universities would resist every encroachment on their academic freedom. But they succumbed to the Nazi dictatorship. The professors who refused to give up their liberty fled the country or went to concentration camps. I pinned my hope for the maintenance of freedom on the press. But most of the editors succumbed or went to prison. But there was a little group in Germany—leaders of the churches—who met in convention and declared "To obey Hitler is to disobey God." Such people declared Einstein, are the hope of the future.

In 1922 the Communists staged a parade in Moscow in which they carried a stuffed figure labeled "Almighty God." When they reached Red Square they burned God in effigy, thereby signifying their contempt for God and for every spiritual interpretation of life. At the same time they launched a campaign in their schools to eliminate the very idea of God from the Russian mind. The campaign was quite successful. There is very little faith left in Russia today. God went out, and freedom went out with Him. When God goes out of the life of a nation liberty languishes, and the door is opened for all manner of barbarity.

So long as men believe in God, they will believe that God is the author of their human rights and freedoms. And they will resist to the death the efforts of any state or any group to deprive them of their God-given rights and liberties. The Christian's supreme loyalty is to God in Christ. He will listen to all men; he will take his moral standards from Christ. He will give his conscience to God and to God alone. If the church did nothing else in the world except to point men to God, she would be rendering a great service to mankind. By keeping faith in God alive, she helps to create a climate in which freedom can flourish.

In the controversy over the race question we need patience with one another. We need understanding and kindness. Above all, we need to create an atmosphere of freedom in which reason and goodwill may do their gracious work.