

A PORTRAIT OF ULTRA-CONSERVATIVES

In all movements, be they civic, political, educational, social or religious you will have a broad spectrum of thought and behavior. On one extreme are those who are liberal, on the other are those who are ultraconservative. This has long been a problem for the Lord's church. The following characteristics come to mind when we contemplate our ultra conservatives:

- * Rather than pursuing peace (I Pet. 3:11), they love conflict and controversy.
- * Rather than meekness and humility (I Pet. 5:5), they often reflect arrogance and pride in their profession.
- * Rather than kindness, gentleness and patience (II Pet. 1:6-7), they reflect bitterness, harshness and impatience.
- * Rather than being long-suffering with those with whom they disagree (Eph. 4:2), they are eager to brand them and be rid of them.
- * Rather than trying to understand another brother's point of view, they are closed minded and determined to destroy him.
- * Rather than using speech filled with grace, seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6), they commonly use harsh, denigrating names and epithets to discredit those who reject their dictates.
- * Rather than building up the kingdom of Christ, they devote all their time and energy to their negative work of finding flaws and attacking others.
- * Rather than taking time to salvage a brother, a church, a good work that has veered from the Bible way (Jude 22-23), they rush to attack and destroy them.
- * Rather than being heart-broken and grief stricken when a brother or church is caught in the snare of error (Phil.3:18), they gleefully rush to dispatch them.
- * Rather than looking for the good a brother, a church or a project is doing they spend their time searching for some flaw, real or imagined.
- * Rather than simply teaching God's Word, they promote their opinions, ideas and deductions about the Word as of equal value with the Bible.
- * Rather than granting other brethren the freedom and liberty to study, think and conclude for themselves about God's message, they decide what must be believed and set about to enforce their conclusions on all others.
- * Rather than seeing themselves as sinners, needing mercy, they think of themselves as detectives and law enforcement officers.
- * Rather than seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10), they devote themselves to seeking out and flailing fellow Christians who do not stand in their small circle.
- * Rather than concentrating on those broad, basic truths of the Bible, they much prefer to focus on the odd and incidental things that are often matters of dispute and misunderstanding.
- * Rather than loving the brotherhood (I Pet. 2:17), they are at war with the brotherhood...all save the handful that think as they do.
- * Rather than work for unity of congregation and the brotherhood (Eph. 4:3), they promote strife and division.
- * Rather than commending what others are doing they prefer to criticize them.
- * Rather than concede their mistakes and errors of interpretation they stoutly defend them and attack those who dare challenge their conclusions, or who refuse to be governed by them.
- * Rather than building up and strengthen congregations (Eph. 4:16), they generally succeed in wrecking them and scattering their members .
- * Rather than "cover a multitude of sins" as love should do (I Pet. 4:8), they delight in uncovering and displaying the sins of others.
- * Rather than openly confessing their sins, they often hide them by directing attention to the sins of others.
- * Rather than extending grace, mercy and forgiveness to erring brothers, they much prefer to execute judgment upon them.
- * Rather than proclaim the grace and mercy of God they prefer to preach the judgment and punishment of God.

- * Rather than explore and find new ways to do God's work and advance his cause, they prefer to find fault with those who do.
- * Rather than leading the church to become a large and flourishing body of people, they devote themselves to keeping it small, fractured and struggling.
- * Rather than respecting congregational autonomy, they feel authorized to invade other congregations and imposed their opinions upon them.
- * Rather than being mere soldiers in the army of Christ, they often perceive of themselves as commanders of others.
- * While ultraconservatives can exist within the larger body of the church for a while, when their demands are not heeded, they nearly always break away and establish their own brotherhood where they can set policy. Every "anti" splinter group was launched by a band of ultraconservatives.
- * In every generation the church has to deal with ultraconservatives. The issues they raise vary from generation to generation, but the attitudes, the methods, the consequences are always the same.
- * The careful student of God's Word and church history knows that truth lies between the extremes of liberalism and ultraconservatism (Prov. 4:25-27).
- * Rather than helping the church, ultraconservatism always harms the body, by splintering and dividing God's people and leaving them weakened and vulnerable to the other extreme of liberalism.

To be conservative is to stand solidly on the Word of God, avoiding extremes of the right or left. It is to have the mind or spirit Jesus in dealing with others who assay to follow the Son. John Waddey

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