

The Need Of the Hour - To Contend Earnestly

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” [Jude 3]

Introduction:

This study is being presented to address – and combat – some very serious lies of the modern day evangelical movement including:

- Unity is more important than doctrine
- Doctrine that causes division is best avoided
- Contention in the church is a bad thing
- Being sincere somehow compensates for being wrong
- Agreeing to disagree is a good thing
- It is a virtue to seek peace, even if truth has to be sacrificed
- You can have your interpretation and I can have mine and somehow we can both be right
- Doctrine is primarily the responsibility of “the clergy”

Let’s start out by looking at an interesting application of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke chapter 16:

Luke 16:27 “Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him [Lazarus] to my father’s house: 28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. 29 Abraham saith unto him, **They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.** 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31 And he said unto him, **If they hear not Moses and the prophets,** neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

Are we - who are professing Christians - really interested in hearing Moses and the prophets? or are we content to assume that the Bible is just too hard to understand? Is some doctrine just too confrontational? too divisive? too mysterious? too this, too that ... Do we want some special messenger from God to come down and make us instant experts in doctrine? Are we willing to work hard to learn more about God’s word and His will?

We are living in a day and age when the Church is theologically very lazy. We prefer to be pew potatoes being spoon fed by charismatic pulpit preachers rather than do our own homework. We seek instant revelations from TV charlatans rather than crack open a bible and diligently study it for hours on end – which is what true Christians should be anxious to do... they will hunger and thirst for righteousness. We need to ask ourselves – is Paul speaking about us here...

Hebrews 5:12 “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

In spite of the fact that the world is in the midst of an information age and an information explosion, the truth is more blurred, more muddled, than ever before, by virtue of the fact that there are so many false teachers and false prophets out there peddling their own flavors of the “truth” - as they see it. Many of these folks are dishing out their own erroneous doctrine, while maintaining that the truth is something elusive that you need them to discover for you. We are living at a time when contending for the faith is more important than ever! It is the need of the hour for Christ’s true Bride!

We are at an hour in the history of the Christian Church, where truth is situational or conditional, arguable, unimportant, ambivalent, irrelevant, even expendable ... anything but absolute and certainly not something worth fighting for or dying for. God’s people must not take a light view of the truth but rather must drive a stake in the ground where truth really lies once they, as individuals - as maturing disciples - discover it. What is the point of driving a stake in the ground? To ensure that you do not budge, do not move, do not waver, do not lose site of the truth, that you worked so long and so hard to find, deep in the passages of scripture. Remember a stake IS subject to movement. The stake should be moved CLOSER to truth, if we find ourselves out of place, and we should be open to correction and instruction at all times, in respect to all doctrines, as we never have a perfect understanding of anything. Everything we believe is subject to modification, as long as we are subject to sin.

Where do we find spiritual truth?

Spiritual truth is found in the Bible of course - as almost all professing Christians will acknowledge. How do we find correct interpretations? With the correct hermeneutic - correct method of interpretation, and it is here that we begin to see differences of opinion in the Church. If we can agree to interpret scripture with scripture, we are more apt to arrive at similar conclusions and more apt to arrive at the *correct* conclusions, conclusions that agree with God’s interpretation of scripture since that is what we should be striving for. That is what it is to have the mind of Christ:

1 Corinthians 2:16 “For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have **the mind of Christ.**”

That is what Paul meant when he exhorted the Philippians to be of one mind....

Philippians 1:27 “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, **with one mind** striving together for the faith of the gospel”

We cannot honestly say that Paul did not care if they had truth, so long as they were of one mind, now can we?

Unity is more important than doctrine?

Unity is NEVER more important than biblical doctrine if that unity is not based on truth. The Bible warns over and over again that believers are to not compromise truth under any circumstances. God's word also points out the need to avoid those who have bad doctrine, primarily false gospels:

2 Corinthians 6:14 "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Wherefore **come out from among them, and be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you"

Doctrine that causes division is best avoided?

We are not to avoid discussing doctrine but we are to avoid PEOPLE who cause division IF they bring bad doctrine into our fellowship...

Romans 16:17 "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences **contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned**; and avoid them."

Division in a local congregation should be avoided **by having the same mind** - by studying scripture and coming to agreement on the proper interpretation, not by agreeing to disagree...

1 Corinthians 1:10 "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together **in the same mind and in the same judgment.**"

If there are 20 people with 20 different interpretations for a scripture passage and only 1 has the correct interpretation, God does not want that one person to pretend that he does not know the truth just so everyone else will be happy.

Contention in the church is a bad thing?

If we do not contend over that which is worth contending for, how do we expect to get the "leaven" out of our midst?

1 Corinthians 5:6 "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

If we ignore erroneous ideas in the interest of "peace" we are building a house on sand that will one day collapse. We are tolerating sin, because it is a sin not to speak the truth when we know it. It is also sin to discourage others from testing the spirits by not allowing them to ask tough questions. And it is wrong to seek peace by evading issues that need to be addressed.

Contending for the faith is a two-edged sword. Do we want to listen to

God when He speaks hard things to us? Or are we going to be like stiffhearted Israel?...

Ezekiel 2:1 And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. 2 And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. 4 For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD. 5 And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. 6 And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. 7 And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. 8 But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. 9 And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; 10 And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. 11 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. 12 So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. 13 And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. 14 And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. 15 For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; 16 Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. 17 But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. 18 Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. 19 As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. 20 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. 21 And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. 22 Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place.

Being sincere somehow compensates for being wrong?

Cain was sincere, but God rejected his sacrifice (Genesis chapter 4). Nadab and Abihu were sincere but God rejected their strange fire and destroyed

them on the spot (Leviticus chapter 10). Nowhere in scripture is sin tolerated on account of the ignorance or sincerity of the sinner.

Agreeing to disagree is a good thing?

Is this what God wants of us? Doesn't He rather want us to study until we find out why we disagree and whether or not one or both of us are wrong about a doctrine?

Proverbs 27:17 "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

If we handle every doctrinal disagreement by agreeing to disagree, we will end up with a very shallow unity based on some lowest common denominator, such as we all "name the name of Christ".

Does God say we can decide which doctrines are trivial, unimportant, and not worth striving to uphold?

But then *which* "Christ" do we all name? Do we even dare to ask *that* question if we shy away from serious discussions on other important spiritual issues? If we try to make the word of God "dull" instead of "sharp" by holding onto it very loosely, we may certainly achieve some sort of false peace or unity, but it will be a worthless accomplishment. Rather than agreeing to disagree, true believers need to agree to continue getting together to study until unity is established based on agreement with God and His word, all of His word, the whole counsel of God, the entirety of scripture as pertains to the doctrine being examined.

Does God say we can decide which doctrines are trivial, unimportant, and not worth striving to uphold? I think we can find our answer here:

Matthew 23:23 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: **these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.**"

All truth and all doctrine are important to God. We may not think so. But God surely thinks so. We usually start ignoring God's commandments a little at a time, starting with the so-called minor issues. It is the "little foxes" that spoil the vines...

Song of Solomon 2:15 " Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."

It is a virtue to seek peace, even if truth has to be sacrificed?

Christ would have had a lot more peace during his ministry on earth if he knew about the above doctrine. It is both odd and strikingly significant that Christ told Pilate the ONE reason why he came into the world was to **bear witness to the truth...**

John 18:37 "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. 38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all."

Christ could have said many things to Pilate. He could have given many true, many valid reasons why he came into the world, but the ONE solitary reason He gave was to “bear witness unto the truth”. And considering how little the Lord of Glory actually said to Pilate, it is also of great note what He said next: **“Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”**

This certainly means that the true disciple of Christ is one who knows the truth, seeks the truth, and proclaims the truth, since those are the ones who are listening to what Christ has to say in His holy word – those are the only ones capable of really hearing Christ – of really having any hope of properly understanding scripture and of having any power to do what it says.

Christ cares about biblical truth. Do YOU care? Christ’s true Church cares about biblical truth. Do YOU care?

It is also very significant that God, speaking through the psalmist, contrasts His own love for truth with His hatred for that which is not true:

Psalms 119:104 “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.”

Knowing God’s view of the importance of biblical truth, who are we to look at doctrine as something that can be set aside in the interest of peace or unity?

God repeats His position on truth and falsehood in verse 128:

Psalms 119:128 “Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.”

What are the false ways that God hates and we are to hate? John Gill sums them up nicely: “every false way; every command, institution, and ordinance of men, which are opposed to the will of God; every false way of worship, all superstition and idolatry; every false doctrine whatsoever is contrary to the testimonies and word of God: and indeed **where there is a true love of the word, worship, and ordinances of God, there must be an hatred of these.**”

Jude 1:3 “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should **earnestly contend for the faith** which was once **delivered** unto the saints.”

Doctrine is primarily the responsibility of “the clergy”?

If doctrine is primarily the responsibility of “the clergy” then why is there no mention of a clergy-laity caste system in the entirety of the New Testament? And why did the Bereans of Acts 17:11 search the scriptures to see if what Paul said was true?

Many of today’s Christians want to be retirees, vacationers, men of leisure, leaving the sorting out of doctrine to the theologians, the scholars, the seminarians. But where does the Bible grant that privilege to delegate the responsibility to another of studying to show one’s self “approved”? If you were a soldier in the army, would you want to know anything about combat and survival or would you want to leave that to others and just go out on the

battlefield without ever getting any training? How much more imperative that Christ's disciples know how to rightly divide the word of truth, that God's word would not be compromised and that the soul saving Gospel of Jesus Christ would be proclaimed as accurately as possible?

Ephesians 6:11 "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: 18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;"

Soldiers are not born with armour on. They need to put it on. Similarly, Christians are not born with biblical knowledge, they need to study it and learn how to apply it and then go out and apply it.

Are you approved unto God?

2 Timothy 2:15 "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

We must be doing something wrong if men are pleased by our silence with regards to the truth.

It is more important that we be approved unto God, that we please God, and not men.

If men are pleased by our silence with regards to the truth, then we are to speak out, we are to contend, to rebuke, to correct, as called for by God's word. Those who think otherwise are adversaries to the will of God as Christ pointed out very bluntly to Peter...

Matthew 16:21 " From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. 23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: **thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.**

Very often, the truth is unpopular and unwanted of sinful men. But that does not mean that we are to keep it from them. Christ told it like it is. He was not putting the "unity" of his twelve disciples above the preaching of truth in Matthew 16, was He? He did not say, "Now Peter, we need to agree to disagree here".

Are you a workman who needeth not to be ashamed?

2 Timothy 2:15 "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman

that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Looking again at 2 Timothy 2:15, we see that studying the Bible requires a workman, and therefore work is involved. We don't learn much without rolling up our sleeves and digging into the scriptures. We may need to look at lots of related words and passages. We may need to examine concordances, interlinears, Greek & Hebrew lexicons, commentaries, and find others more knowledgeable than us to point us in the right direction. However, we won't be able to find out who is really knowledgeable if we don't read and study the bible diligently on our own. As we learn more and more about the Bible, God will show us who the trustworthy teachers are, as we compare their teachings with scripture. People I once thought were good Bible teachers I have since learned don't even have a proper understanding of salvation, i.e. the doctrines of Grace. So I now am all the more suspicious of what these Bible teachers teach and I am more inclined to either stay away from their writings or at least exercise more caution when seeing what these folks have to say. When it comes to the work of studying the Bible, do we want to quit and go home early or are we willing to labor until we better understand some doctrine that we don't have a good grip on yet. Also, is it honest to disagree with someone even if we have not *thoroughly* examined passages they use to refute our beliefs?

Are you striving to rightly divide the word of truth?

2 Timothy 2:15 “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**”

Looking at the remainder of 1 Timothy 2:15, (rightly dividing the word of truth) we see that it is not enough that the disciple merely engage in the work of studying the scriptures, but the goal must be to “rightly divide it”, to reach proper interpretations and applications of it. What profit is there in building a bridge if it will not stand up under a load? What profit is there in studying the Bible if we are not to thoroughly test our conclusions with everything the Bible has to say about the subject we are delving into.

What did it cost God and His messengers to deliver the truth to us?

Hebrews 11:35 “Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: 36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: 37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

How much do we value what it cost God and His messengers to deliver the truth to us? When was the last time you heard of someone being rounded up and killed for possessing a bible, in America that is?

We must ask ourselves: Do we deny the truth by not contending for it? Do we belittle it by spending far more time in other pursuits than in discussing doctrine with anyone?

Do we devalue God's Word by not aggressively studying it and earnestly contending for the truth therein?

Concluding remarks:

We certainly need to bear in mind that we are not to cast our pearls before swine. To endlessly debate with the unsaved or with argumentative believers without any light or truth being accepted is not a profitable endeavor. But to run from a discussion as a way to avoid dealing with our own ignorance on a subject is not profitable either. Nor is it biblical. Also, to ignore the need to resolve differences regarding doctrine and its application - in the interest of obtaining temporary peace and false unity in the home, in the local church or elsewhere - is a recipe for disaster, be it sooner or later. Because if we are a little bit off track today, we are apt to be way off course down the road. If you don't care about that, then maybe you are on the wrong road, the wide road that leads to destruction, where being biblically "off track" doesn't matter a whole lot to the travelers on that road.

Matthew 7:13 "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Hopefully, if you are a professing believer, you will have the attitude of the psalmist, who said:

Psalms 119:35 "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight."

and as one who delights to go in the path of God's commandments, you will desire to earnestly contend for the faith, even if it means being unpopular, even if it means hard work, and even if it means re-examining your position on doctrines that you thought you properly understood already.