
Words of Truth

When Bible Study Overly Emphasizes Answering False Doctrines

By: Brian A. Yeager

Sometimes the need to teach and learn about standing for the truth against false brethren supersedes other spiritual matters. That will sometimes change the course of what is taught. We see this in the Scriptures. Notice: *“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. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Jude 1:3-4).

We should, as Paul was, be set for the defense of the Gospel (Philippians 1:17). False doctrines and those that teach them must be exposed (Matthew 12:1-8, Matthew 16:6-12, Matthew 15:1-14, Acts 15:1-35, Romans 16:17-18, I Corinthians 1:10-17, Galatians 5:1-12, Colossians 2:6-23, II Timothy 2:14-18, Titus 1:10-14, Revelation 2:14-16, etc.). The threat of false teachers and their influence is a real concern we must all share (Matthew 7:15-20 and II Peter 2:1-3). Therefore, we have to be aware of and capable of answering false doctrines.

Over the years I have seen individuals and congregations that never spent time studying various false doctrines and answering them. On the other hand, I have seen others that spent most of their time discussing false doctrines and how to answer them. As with all things, there must be a delicate balance. Being prepared to defend the truth to save souls is just one part of many things we need to know and do as faithful disciples of the Lord.

So, what happens when we as followers of Christ get overly focused on just answering false doctrine? What happens when we become so militant in our approach to studying the Scriptures that every time we study it turns into how we can expose some error someone or some false religious body teaches? Let's consider a congregation that became overly militant and see what happened.

When An Assembly Of Christians Becomes Steady Against Error, But Unbalanced

The body of believers assembling in the city of Ephesus had a heavy presence of error to deal with. In that city was one of the “great wonders of the world” (as the world saw it). The “great goddess Diana” was an idol that many in Asia and throughout the world was said to worship. This idol was so significant to people that Paul's preaching against idolatry got him and the saints in Ephesus in trouble with the people of Ephesus (Acts 19:21-41). They also were forewarned that false brethren were going to come in and even from within (Acts 20:28-31).

Since the saints in Ephesus had this to contend with, they were certainly taught to be militant (Ephesians 6:10-17). Being militant is part of a being a faithful Christian (II Corinthians 10:1-5, Philippians 1:27, I Timothy 1:18, I Timothy 6:12, and II Timothy 2:1-4). The congregation in Ephesus lost their balance though. Consider what happened to them: *“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God”* (Revelation 2:1-7).

What you learned, in reading the text quoted above, is that the saints in Ephesus labored, exposed false brethren, and they did not faint. They hated the deeds of false individuals such as the Nicolaitans. That all was great. However, they left their first love. They needed to be restored by remembering from whence they fell and do the first works before it was too late. The congregation in Ephesus was not always unbalanced.

Paul said these things to the elders in Ephesus: *“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house... Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”* (Acts 20:20 and Acts 20:26-27). They were taught a balance. The problem was that they became unbalanced. What can we learn from that? Can we allow our fight for the truth to have us neglect other areas of life?

Use The Scriptures For More Than A Book Against Error

The Scriptures guide us in how to live (Luke 4:4). The word of God is a complete book on how to be perfect as the Scriptures teach us everything from salvation to how to do all good works (II Timothy 3:15-17). There is a reason that preaching is about “all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). The word of God is spirit and life (John 6:63). Don't limit what you can learn to just how you might answer some false doctrine. Study so that you can learn how to live here and now (i.e. Colossians 3:1-17). Study so that you can learn how to please the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:1-2). Use the Scriptures as the source of wisdom that they are (Proverbs 8:1-36).

Conclusion

The church here in El Paso must not fall as Ephesus did. We can be whole in our studies. We can learn to defend the truth against error and not fall out of love with our Lord in the process. We can study to answer false doctrines and also study how to live faithfully to God on this earth. I am committed to teach a balance (cf. II Timothy 4:2-5). Will you do your part?