
Words of Truth

Earnestly Contend For The Faith

By: Brian A. Yeager

In a context dealing with false brethren, the book of Jude says this: *“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).

Jude had intended to write about the common salvation. What that means is, he intended to write about salvation in Christ (Acts 4:10-12). However, the situation required a change in subject matter. Remember, the Holy Spirit is the real author of this book (I Corinthians 2:9-13 and II Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, the directional change in subject matter was the decision of the Spirit of the Lord. The command to earnestly contend for the faith came about, in this context, because of those who crept in amongst the saints, but were not faithful to the Lord. The book of Jude is often paralleled to the writing of Peter, because of the same subject matter (II Peter 2:1-22). The fact that there are false brethren requires that we stand ready and able to defend the truth against them.

The command to earnestly contend for the faith, in context, is not talking about standing against denominationalism. The word of the Lord does not overly caution us against wolves. The word of God cautions us against wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15-20). When false brethren arise we need faithful brethren capable and willing to expose them (Romans 16:17-18). When false brethren creep in, we need faithful brethren ready and able to see them and not allow them to influence others (Galatians 2:1-5). These are things we are commanded to do. Our contending for the faith shouldn't just be because we are commanded to do so though. That is why the instruction is to “earnestly contend”. So, when error arises, are we earnest in our contending for the truth?

Where Is The Conviction?

The English word “earnest” means: “resulting from or showing sincere and intense conviction” (Oxford New American Dictionary). When the truth is challenged, we should have the conviction to be able and willing to defend it (Philippians 1:17). That is an easy point to understand. For the sake of thought though, take some consideration of the wording “intense conviction”. What does that mean? Does God expect us to be intense in our conviction for His truth? Can we just get by with having a complacent, laid back approach to standing for the truth of the Gospel of Christ? Let's consider those questions.

Here is an example of intense conviction, it is contextually speaking of Apollos: *“And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ”* (Acts 18:27-28).

Does God expect us to be willing and able to act as Apollos did? Yes! Notice: *“As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time. Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong... 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”* (I Corinthians 16:12-13 and Philippians 1:27).

Will God be pleased if we decide to just sit back and let the truth be trampled while we say or do nothing about it? No! Notice: *“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth”* (Revelation 2:14-16).

Now, we can clearly see that God demands we stand for the truth. He expects that we are combat ready [spiritually speaking] (Ephesians 6:10-17 and I Timothy 6:12). There is another side of this though. There are some who go to the other extreme and become earnestly contentious for the faith. This is just as wrong as not contending for the faith at all.

Earnestly Contend Without Being Contentious

The word of God says: *“As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife”* (Proverbs 26:21). A contentious individual is someone who is likely to cause arguments and/or controversy. This wisdom is not from God (James 3:13-18). Strife is a work of the flesh that will cause those involved in such to be eternally lost (Galatians 5:19-21).

While we must contend for the faith (Proverbs 28:4), we should not enjoy the fights that come about from it. In fact, faithful Christians are lovers of peace not of division (I Peter 3:8-11). It should SCARE US when someone amongst us enjoys the battle. When we are fighting for the truth, against error, that means souls are lost. How can any Christian have ANY pleasure in that? As we earnestly contend for the faith, don't get caught up in loving the fight.

Conclusion

At the end of our lives, we want to have fought a good fight (II Timothy 4:6-8; cf. I Timothy 6:12). Keep it spiritual (II Corinthians 10:1-5)! Fight to save souls. Know when to walk away (Matthew 7:6 and II Timothy 2:23). Be zealous, but not erringly so (Romans 10:1-3)!