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Contentiously Contending, on: 2017/8/9 15:00

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Jude urges us "to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 3). Many have found this verse a wonderful excuse to be argumentative, contentious, vindictive, loud, aggressive, mean, nasty and antagonistic as they vigorously pursue all who do not agree with their version of the truth. But is this really what Jude meant? While Jude makes this statement, he does not elaborate on how we are to contend. For this we need to look at the rest of the New Testament. Many build an entire ministry, and excuse their bad attitude, based on this single word. Doing so is as wrong as any error they may be standing against since they take this word out of the context of the general teaching of the Bible.

Jesus is our prime example and He is not ungracious in His interface with the enemies of the Gospel. Even when contending with the Devil in the wilderness He simply quoted the Word in a defensive manner. He never went over to the offense, and He did not resort to calling the Devil names or attacking him personally. The reality is that He did not have anything to prove. He was secure in His ministry and mission, and in Who He was. It seems to me that those who take the battle personally, and who resort to malicious attacks on those who believe and teach error, are insecure in who they are and in what they believe, and therefore need to prove themselves by discrediting everyone else around them.

One of the things that distinguished the unconverted Saul from the converted Paul was the aggression of the first and the meekness (not weakness) of the second. He changed from being the pursuer to being pursued, and from the aggressor to the defender. Yes, he never hesitated to defend the truth and was very forthright in denouncing evil, but that malicious streak was left behind on the Damascus Road. He understood that he was "appointed for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17). The Faith was something that needed to be defended, and not to be forced on those who had no interest in truth. Is it possible that those who aggressively seek to force their point of view on others have not been converted and are contending in the flesh? There is little difference between such people and the radical Muslim, Nazi or other extremist. It seems to me the attitude and method is the same, it's just the ideology that is different.

Then there are those who use Ephesians 6:17 as an excuse to use the Word as a dagger and a knife to cut, stab and maim those that cross their path. But this verse gives absolutely no sanction to use the Bible to cut and hurt other people. In fact, the context is clear that the armor is to be used in our struggle against the Devil and his demons, and specifically excludes flesh and blood from the battle (Ephesians 6:11&12). There is no verse in the Bible that gives us the right to use the Bible as a sword against people. Even when contending with Satan, the Sword is primarily a defensive weapon. Anyone who has watched a fencing match or a sword fight in the movies will recognize that ninety-nine per cent of the time the sword is used defensively to ward off the opponent's attacks. Only rarely is it actually used to lunge or attack.

Remember again how Jesus used the Scriptures against the Devil: He simply quoted the Scriptures and defended His position. He never attacked. Thus, those who use the Bible to cut and stab other people are wrong on two counts. It was the carnal, unconverted Peter who used the sword to slash the man's ear off but it was Christ Who stuck the ear back on again (Luke 22:50-51). It was on the same occasion that Jesus warned that "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Those who use the Bible as a sword to maim, kill and attack are declaring that they are more like the unregenerate Peter than the Savior.

Neither does the end justify the means. It does not matter how noble your cause may be "if you go about it in an un-Christ-like carnal way you will not have the Lord's blessing but will rather fall afoul of His judgment. "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matthew 7:2) and "judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy" (James 2:13).

Now before you accuse me of saying that we should not stand for truth against error "that is not what I am saying. We must contend for the faith, defend the Gospel and point out error. But the attitude and method with which we do so are of utmost importance. Yes, just as important as the what is the how. We must speak the truth, but we must do so with love. (Ephesians 4:15). I am afraid that I see a few speak the truth, but of those few most speak the truth with hate, anger, bitterness, arrogance and vindictiveness. It does not matter how much truth you speak; if you do so with the wrong attitude

de you are wasting your time. The Lord will not honor you and He will not bless your words. 1Corinthians 13 is abundantly clear that it does not matter how great your (Bible) knowledge, how much you speak, how many books or articles you have written or what sacrifices you have made – even to martyrdom. If you have not been driven by a love for those you address, you have wasted your time and you are just another big noise.

What is it that motivates you to defend the truth? Some do so out of a love for themselves, and others because they love to be right and love to prove how wrong others are. The only legitimate motivation is love for the Lord Jesus, love for His Word and love for those who are lost. If you are not motivated by a love for all three, you are wasting everyone's time – rather get into politics or something else, but forget about speaking for the Lord Jesus. Unless we love what He loves and hate what He hates we have no right to speak on His behalf. Yes, He does hate error, but He hates arrogance even more, and He loves the sinner and the heretic. Until we genuinely love and weep for the heretics, we have no right to speak to or about them. How dare we claim to represent the One who laid down His life for us when we are more interested in proving how right we are than saving those who are lost and going astray?

Excerpt taken from Anton Bosch