

Contending Earnestly for the Faith

*“Ye should
earnestly contend
for the faith which
was once delivered
unto the saints.”*

—*Jude 1:3*

THE OBLIGATION TO CON-
tend earnestly for the faith
is one which the follower of
Christ cannot avoid without
spiritual loss to himself. The
world's general spirit of self-

ishness is no friend to the Christian, and Satan, the
prince of this world, is ever seeking to becloud the
Truth in the hearts and minds of the children of light.

Satan, our great Adversary, is an arch deceiver.
Appearing as an angel of light, he often suggests to
the Christian that to take a firm stand for the faith
and to contend for it would mean to have a conten-
tious spirit, and, therefore, be wrong for the follower
of Christ. (II Cor. 11:14) There is a vast difference,
however, between contending for the faith and being
contentious. The contending which the Scriptures
condemn is that of selfishly striving for position or
power among the brotherhood, or for promoting our

own ideas while deriding those of others. (Rom. 2:8) All such selfish contending is wrong, and leads away from the Lord instead of closer to him.

Among the Lord's people, even in the days of the apostles, there was a tendency at times to fight among each other, rather than to fight the good fight of faith and to strive against Satan's deceptive practices, the selfish spirit of the world, and the weaknesses within ourselves. The means of destructiveness and combativeness which should serve the Christian soldier in good stead are those directed only against his own weaknesses and blemishes. Such striving, however, is out of place when misdirected against the brethren, and especially so regarding matters whose importance is exaggerated. Those who are contentious along this line should remember the scriptural statement that "he that ruleth his spirit [is better] than he that taketh a city."—Prov. 16:32

The Apostle Paul gives a stern warning regarding improper contention: "If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed of another." (Gal. 5:15) Such strife in the church is destructive of that which is truly spiritual and edifying among the Lord's people. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we should be slack as respects the important principles of divine revelation. The apostle further declares: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." "Continue to stand firm and keep a tight grip on the teachings you have received from us, whether by word of mouth or by letter."—I Thess. 5:21; II Thess. 2:15, *Williams New Testament*

The Lord's consecrated people, having enlisted as soldiers of Jesus Christ, should continually keep

watch that they are walking in line with the spirit of the Truth—that is, the spirit of holiness. It is to this that our text refers, namely, a contention which is not only proper, but necessary, for all who are walking in the light. These are to “earnestly contend for the faith,” for the Word of God, for the promises which God has made, and for the good things which God has outlined both for the church and for all mankind in his wondrous plan.

Today, the Truth of God’s Word, even as in the apostle’s day, is still in disesteem, and subject to ridicule and attack. To resist these in the spirit of meekness and humility, yet without compromise, is the duty and privilege of the Christian. This is one of the ways in which God, in his wisdom, tests the sincerity and devotion of his people. He desires that all who shall reign with Christ in his Messianic kingdom be a tested people, a people of decision and character.

Character implies fixity of purpose and intention, and a determination to fight a “good fight of faith” against every influence tending to lead away from the Lord’s Word. (I Tim. 6:12) The theories and beliefs of today’s religious world are largely in opposition to the Word of Truth and to the Lord’s people who are striving to be led by its spirit. This means that our fight is not against one another, nor even with the people of the world, but against the selfish and God-dishonoring teachings and philosophies which prevail at the present time.

Even in this it is necessary to be on guard, for it is possible for one to be contentious in religious matters, even to “earnestly contend,” and yet not be contending “for the faith which was once delivered

unto the saints.” One might, for example, be contentious over some pet theory of his own, rather than for those principles of righteousness which the Bible inculcates.

For one person to argue with another on scriptural subjects is not necessarily contending for the faith. In the first place, neither individual may be arguing on behalf of the real faith once delivered to the saints. In addition, although one individual in such an argument might seem to be holding technically to the doctrine of the Truth, his motive in so doing might not be that of love. He may have a measure of pride, and a desire to reveal his profound knowledge of the Bible and his ability to dispute convincingly. All such motivations are fully out of harmony with our text.

The contention which God would approve is an earnest effort to uphold whatever God’s Word teaches, and a sincere desire to be in character harmony with it. Such a contending for the faith should never include a misuse of the tongue to speak slanderously of others. In all of our contentions we should manifest the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit—gentleness, brotherly kindness and love. Our spirit and demeanor should never partake of anger, hatred, malice or strife.

THE FAITH

The essence of the faith once delivered to the saints is that wonderful statement of Truth which says that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Confirming this, the Apostle Paul writes, “God

commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”—Rom. 5:8

The faith, or Gospel of Christ, as presented in the foregoing verses, is seen as a revelation of God’s boundless love toward his earthly creatures, in that through his Son he has made provision for their recovery from sin and its penalty, death. Any high-sounding philosophy, no matter how eloquently set forth, which offers some other means of life and happiness than that provided through the redemptive work of Christ, must be resisted by the Christian.

The Scripture declares that the benefits of Christ’s atoning work are available to the sinner only upon the basis of belief: “Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This means that all theories which presume that salvation is obtainable upon the basis of ignorance concerning the only “name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,” are contrary to the faith once delivered to the saints, and hence cannot be permitted to have a place in true Christian belief.—Acts 4:12

This emphasizes the importance of knowledge, and of the fundamental part that it plays in the life of the follower of Christ. It means that we cannot say it does not make any difference what we believe, that the only important matter is how we live. A proper understanding of the place which knowledge occupies in the Christian faith should make us realize that from God’s standpoint it is impossible to live right unless we believe right. Thus, we cannot properly separate sound doctrine from righteous living.

FAITH BASED ON KNOWLEDGE

The Apostle Paul appropriately raises the question, “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14) This poses the further inquiry as to how the Gospel affects the millions who still are dying without knowledge of Christ and his atoning work for them. We do not need to search long for the answer, because the same inspired writer declares concerning God’s plan for the enlightenment of the world, and the offering of salvation thereby, that he “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the Truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:4-6

Paul’s explanation that the knowledge of Christ’s atoning work is to be testified to all “in due time” is an important key for the unlocking of God’s great treasure-house of truth. It means that if the due time for many is not before death, there is a guarantee that it shall be in the resurrection—another key component of the faith once delivered to the saints.

With this fundamental Scriptural fact before us, there is meaning to the words of Jesus to the effect that it will be more favorable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for those who opposed him amidst greater light. (Mark 6:11) There is also meaning given to Paul’s words in Romans 11:25-32, by which he shows that there is hope beyond the grave even for the unbelieving Jews who crucified the Master. Thus, contending for the faith once delivered to the saints calls for upholding the grand teachings of the Bible which

outline a hope of future life and blessing for both Jews and Gentiles of all nations—"in due time."

THE PROMISED SEED

While God intends to bless the entire human race, the Bible indicates that he purposed this blessing to come to them through the "seed" of Abraham. (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18) In the New Testament, Paul shows clearly that the seed through which the promised blessings are to come is in reality Christ and his church. (Gal. 3:8,17,27-29) While the natural descendants of Abraham, the Jewish nation, were given the first opportunity to qualify as the spiritual seed of promise, yet this opportunity, in due time, was extended also to the Gentiles.

It may seem a commendable attitude to believe and teach that God loves one group of religionists as much as he does the other, and that all roads lead to heaven. However, loyalty to the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures demands that in contending earnestly for the faith, followers of Christ should assert that only in this way, namely, through the seed of Abraham, will God display his favor and shower his blessings upon a sin-cursed and dying world. God does love all groups of sincerely religious people, and there is no doubt but that he appreciates their devoted efforts to worship him. Yet, he has his own plan for man's salvation, in harmony with which he is working out his kind designs, and he will not change his all-wise plan to accommodate the many conflicting religious opinions of a fallen race.

TWO SALVATIONS

Long and heated have been the arguments as to whether the redeemed of God are to live on the earth

or be transferred to a heavenly abode. In reality, both a heavenly and an earthly reward for believers are promised in the Word of God. To the rich young nobleman whom Jesus invited to become his follower, the Master said, "Thou shalt have treasure in heaven." (Mark 10:21) In Hebrews 3:1 the apostle writes to the church: "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." To members of the body of Christ, the seed of Abraham, Paul writes, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."—Col. 3:1

To the redeemed and fully tested world of mankind at the close of the thousand-year judgment day, the invitation will be extended, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34) We need only to recall the opening chapters of Genesis to know that the kingdom prepared for man "from the foundation of the world" was an earthly kingdom, including a home upon the earth under perfect conditions of Edenic happiness. There was nothing heavenly about that provision, and when those conditions are restored to mankind, they will be blessings to be enjoyed here in an earthly paradise restored worldwide.

In Acts 3:20-23, Peter sets forth the divine purpose pertaining to the blessing of the world following the second coming of Christ, describing it as "times of restitution of all things." Restitution denotes restoration, not exaltation or change to a higher nature. In Revelation 21:3, where earthly kingdom blessings for mankind are described, we are told

that “the tabernacle of God is with men,” that is, with human beings.

It seems clear, therefore, that a heavenly reward and joint heirship with Christ as kings in his kingdom, is God’s provision for Jesus’ footstep followers during the present age. It is equally clear that the blessings to come to the remainder of mankind through the administration of Christ’s kingdom will be on earth. It will be a restoration of that which was lost because of sin, this being possible because Jesus, by his own death, provided a cancellation for the original penalty placed upon Father Adam.—Rom. 5:12,18,19; I Cor. 15:21-23,45-48

Surely this wondrous harmony of God’s plan, revealing such a glorious hope for the church, and a blessed opportunity of earthly salvation for the entire human family, is something for which it is truly worthwhile to contend. By contending for such a faith, we exalt the glory of God in our own hearts, and sound forth his praises upon the ears of others. No wonder the apostle said “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”—Rom. 1:16

THE WORK OF THIS AGE

The general conception of many is that the present age marks the end of divine mercy toward the human family, but this is a great error. This age is distinctively one of suffering and sacrifice for others—the selection of only a “little flock.” (Luke 12:32) It began with the ransom price provided by the death of Jesus. It has continued with the experiences of sacrifice, suffering and service of his footstep followers, who are “planted together in the likeness of his death,” and who share the “fellowship of his

sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”
—Rom. 6:5; Phil. 3:10

The purpose of the present Gospel Age is not to convert all of mankind, but to gather out “a people for his name.” The coming Messianic Age, now nigh at hand, we believe, will be the time when earthly salvation is offered to all mankind, “the residue of men.” (Acts 15:14-18) It will be then that the entire human race will have the opportunity to reap the benefits of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. Together, Christ and his church will constitute a sympathetic “royal priesthood” in assisting mankind back to perfection in their “day of visitation.”—I Pet. 2:9,12

An understanding of God’s covenants in operation during these two ages is another important part of the faith once delivered to the saints. The Apostle Paul, in his allegorical treatment of this subject recorded in Galatians 4:21-31, reminds us that as part of Abraham’s “seed,” as noted earlier, the church during the present Gospel Age is developed under the Sarah feature of the Abrahamic Covenant, and identifies these as “children of promise,” just as Isaac was. The apostle further links this covenant to a heavenly hope, “that which is above,” which is “the mother of us all.”

Regarding the Messianic Age, the church, then glorified, will share with Christ in his role as “mediator of the new covenant.” (Heb. 12:24) This “New Covenant” will be made first with the “house of Israel” and with the “house of Judah.” Gradually, it will extend to all people, as mankind sees the manifold blessings and favors which come to those who bring themselves under the righteous influences and the just and loving terms of that covenant.

(Jer. 31:27-34; 32:36-42; Rom. 11:26,27,32,33) The wonderful promises pertaining to the New Covenant are of an earthly nature. As a result of its work in the hearts and minds of mankind during the Messianic Age, the fulfillment of the promise will come—that all the families of the earth will be blessed.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Acts 3:25

There are important time features also in the plan of God to which we should give heed. Christ came at his First Advent at the divinely appointed time. His Second Advent is also at the “due time” set by the Heavenly Father. Though we will not detail them here, the Scriptures include many prophetic statements which outline the manner, purpose, and signs to look for with regard to our Lord’s return and invisible presence. We believe that the fulfillment of many of these prophecies indicates that we are indeed now living during the time of Christ’s second presence, during the end, or Harvest, of the Gospel Age. We rejoice at this aspect of the faith which has been delivered to the Lord’s saints. Here again, however, we must be sure that our joy is not of a selfish or contentious kind, but founded only upon humility, kindness and love.

As Christians, we can be resolute in our belief without being unkind. We can contend earnestly for our faith without sitting in judgment of others. Above all, it is important that we be firm in our beliefs, not because we may be able to convince others, but because a full assurance of faith adds to our own strength of character. If we maintain our standing before the Lord, by faithfully obeying the instructions of his Word, our life’s work as Christians will be crowned with glory.—Rom. 2:7; Rev. 2:10 ■