Contending for the Faith

"Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine."
—I Timothy 1:2,3

IN HIS FIRST EPISTLE TO Timothy, the Apostle Paul, who considers Timothy to be his spiritual son, lovingly exhorts him to tolerate no alteration of the doctrines of 'the faith.' Paul, understanding the Greek fondness for philosophizing, urges him to steadfastly resist the subtle dangers of those meaningless intellectual exercises concerning the faith which would only elicit more questions and eventual doubt. "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. . . . According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the

ministry. . . . This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare."—I Tim. 1:4,11,12,18

In these verses, Paul, ever cognizant of the awesome privilege and responsibility of having the Gospel entrusted to his care, assigns, in turn, this same responsibility to the faithful who would continue after him in the work of keeping the Gospel message pure, as it was once delivered to the saints.

"I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords."—I Tim. 6:13-15

Our Lord gave such eloquent witness for his Father's absolute Truth at Calvary. During the course of this Gospel Age there have been a faithful few willing, likewise, to give their very lives if necessary as a witness for that same Truth. These few have preached a faith untainted by the theories of men, a faith free of perverse creeds born of sectarian prejudices, a faith that tolerates no alteration of the Truth to mollify the unstable or the uninitiated.

PAUL, THE VETERAN

Paul, as an aging veteran of spiritual warfare, charged the younger Timothy with protecting this precious Truth by remaining faithful to its simplicity. "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and

oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee."—I Tim. 6:20,21

There is urgency in Paul's exhortations. His concern is particularly acute in reference to those who would be zealously protecting the present doctrines of Truth during the "last days" of the Gospel Age. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."—II Tim. 3:1

The same sense of urgency characterized Jude's exhortation for his brethren to "contend for the faith." "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 3,4

Those 'ungodly men' who were 'of old ordained to this condemnation' were those spoken of by Enoch long before Jude's day. "Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince [convict] all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."—vss. 14,15

NEEDFUL EXHORTATION

Jude says that it was 'needful' that he write his beloved brethren and exhort them to 'contend for

the faith which was once delivered to the saints' because, even in his time, there were those who were not holding to the doctrines of the faith.

Some have inferred the phrase 'contend for the faith' to be a license for confrontation in the service of the Truth; a license to take the fight to the colaborers; a license to quarrel over issues of exaggerated importance. That this was not Jude's intended message is made clear in verse three, "My friends, I was fully engaged in writing to you about our salvation—which is yours no less than ours—when it became urgently necessary to write at once and appeal to you to join the struggle in defence of the faith which God entrusted to his people once and for all."—*New English Bible*

Jude did not write to urge his brethren to contentiously struggle with each other in defense of the faith. Contention is something which ungodly men can exploit to cause divisions among the Lord's people. Jude identifies the ungodly men that Enoch spoke of as being those who cause divisions. "These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit."—Jude 16-19, *New International Version*

JOINING THE COMMITTED

Contending for the faith, then, is the joining with that committed minority of this age who defend the faith-stimulating sound doctrine. This minority grows ever smaller as the harvest draws on, while the assault of the Truth becomes ever more subtle and determined. The duty of this minority is to guard and defend the doctrinal truths that are based on what the Apostle Paul was determined to

defend, and know nothing beyond "Jesus Christ, and him crucified."—I Cor. 2:2

All the height, width, depth, and breadth of God's plan of salvation reside in this simple, clear, and pure phrase. The faith once delivered to the saints is grounded, built, and completed in the doctrinal truths embedded in these five simple words. What eternal and universal weight they contain! Only the saints are privileged to know at this time the exact magnitude and import of these words. It is these five words and all they represent by way of hope for the church and all mankind that have been, now are, and will be for a time to come, under Satan's relentless attack.

Severe tests of faith and endurance will come to those who have grown weary of advancing with the light, and who have become overly fond of, and complacent with, the dispensational truths of the past. Those who choose to rest, as many have done in the past as the doctrinal light moved along, inevitably fall prey to the wiles of the ungodly men written of by Jude.

Paul foresaw there would be those who would profess to be colaborers in God's service but who would "not endure sound doctrine." "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."—II Tim. 4:2-5

PETER ADDS HIS VOICE

The Apostle Peter joins the chorus of voices calling for a concerted and committed defense of the Truth as he specifies some of those 'things' mentioned by Paul to Timothy. "Therefore, I will be ready always to remind you of these things although you know and are established in the present truth."—II Pet. 1:12, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

Although one might know and be established in 'present truth,' Peter cautions, there are other vital things that must not be overlooked by those who would make their calling and election sure. The apostle lists those in verses five through seven, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."

That present Truth must be supplemented with those character-building features for one to make one's calling and election sure, Peter left no doubt. However, Peter did not, by this, intend to minimize the importance of the doctrines of present Truth. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."—II Pet. 1:19

Peter would certainly have been in agreement with Paul's sentiments expressed in I Timothy 1:18,19. "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have

made shipwreck." The clear inference being that without these doctrines which constitute present Truth at any given stage of the plan of God, one could not carry on the good fight, regardless of the attention given to character building.

PRESENT TRUTH

Prophecy, or doctrine, understood in its due time is 'present Truth.' It is, therefore, of great importance, particularly during the closing harvest period of the Gospel Age, that the Lord's people be found advancing with the doctrinal light of what the Apostle Peter called present Truth. The charge to protect this present Truth has been passed from our Heavenly Father to our Lord, from our Lord to the apostles, from the apostles on to the early church, and on through the Gospel Age to those of us who are living in the present perilous last days of the harvest.

Paul said that some in his day (the beginning of the Gospel Age) had not maintained clear consciences toward the Gospel light and, as a result, had made shipwreck of the faith—no doubt their own as well as others. He added that, at the end of the Gospel Age, false teachers would multiply and gain influence, and overthrow the faith of all who do not maintain a clear conscience toward the Truth and study it without personal theory or prejudice.

The corruption of the Truth most often begins with seemingly insignificant compromises whose end is devastation—devastation to the Truth and to the faith that the Truth inspires. The Apostle Paul knew and wanted to impress upon Timothy that compromised Truth is a mere approximation of Truth. The apostle foreknew that centuries of

heathen, pagan, Gentile thought would eventually produce the perception that God has a relative scale of righteousness; that he hated some iniquity more than another.

RIGHTEOUSNESS NOT RELATIVE

Paul was most eager to have Timothy understand that our Heavenly Father does not exist in an indistinct realm of equivocation where issues of righteousness are relative. Paul wanted to impress upon Timothy, that God is absolute and his principles and laws are absolute; that his Truth is absolute and must be defended as such. Timothy was cautioned not to allow himself to be drawn into philosophic and semantic 'babbling,' the conclusions of which would inevitably lead to mere approximations of the Truth.

Nothing that is approximately the Truth is of God. There are no degrees of heathenism. One cannot be slightly heathen, somewhat pagan. There are various kinds of righteousness, but there are not various degrees of righteousness. There were not various degrees to which the Israelites could keep the Mosaic Law—the inflexible standard of God. One either kept the entire Law or one failed entirely!

One cannot be partially holy, partially harmless, partially undefiled, partially separate from sinners. A contrary belief is a God-dishonoring and dangerous perception of righteousness; God-dishonoring because it suggests he is more tolerant of certain evils than others; dangerous because such belief promotes equivocation, and equivocation eventually destroys moral clarity, making the identification of evil progressively more difficult.

NO HIERARCHY OF EVIL

There exists no hierarchy of evil with God. From the Divine perspective, an unkind word that wounds is equivalent to a literal sword thrust to the heart. Both are equally appalling to God. Both are equally condemned. "Thou shalt not kill." (Exod. 20:13) "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. . . . But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."—Matt. 15:11,18,19

In a corrupt and disintegrating world, the duty and privilege of the consecrated is the same as Paul's, Timothy's, and Jude's, viz. to help raise and defend the Divine standard, the one standard that will remain unshaken by the intense circumstances with which this Gospel Age ends.

Let us not be distracted from our charge by weariness, or worldly cares, remembering that this day will declare our work, of what sort it is. Let us not count it as of little consequence if we are encouraged to ignore present Truth as unimportant, or as an impediment to fellowship or unity. Let us 'join the struggle in defense of the faith which God entrusted to his people once and for all' as Jude so earnestly encourages us to do.

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."—I Cor. 3:13 ■