

Contending Biblically 3

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of gentleness, patience, and humility in correcting others' errors while relying on God's power for true change.

Scripture: Psalm 127:1, Proverbs 3:5, John 19:11, Galatians 5:23, Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 6:12, 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 1 Timothy 3:2, 2 Timothy 2:23, Titus 3:1

Topics: "Correcting Others", "Humility In Ministry"

Description

Anton Bosch emphasizes the importance of following the clear command in 2 Timothy 2:23-26 to avoid disputes, be gentle to all, and be patient when correcting others' doctrine. He highlights the need for humility, meekness, and the ability to teach when dealing with those in error, stressing that only God can grant repentance and lead individuals to acknowledge the truth. Bosch cautions against pride, arrogance, and a critical spirit, urging believers to approach correction with compassion, mercy, and a heart of brokenness.

Transcript

" But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2Timothy 2:23-26 KJV).

These verses are a clear and unequivocal command: The servant of the Lord is to avoid disputes and must not quarrel but be gentle to all. There are no exceptions, ifs or buts. It does not say we are not to quarrel except with those who are heretics and that we are to be gentle to those who agree with us. We are not to quarrel. Period. We are to be gentle to ALL, including the heretics and "those who are in opposition".

I know that those who wish to disagree will quote various other scriptures of what Jesus and Paul may have done. But these verses from Timothy are a direct command, equal to the Ten or any other direct command in the New Testament. Those who claim that the Bible sanctions ungracious, vindictive and rude behavior are blatantly disobedient to this very clear instruction. Such disobedience places them at the same level as those whose doctrine they condemn. They choose to ignore certain scriptures and to emphasize others exactly the same thing that those with the bad attitude and "right" doctrine do. We had

better remove the splint first.

It is important to note, however that the injunction to "...avoid foolish and ignorant disputes...[to] not quarrel but be gentle to all..." is specifically to the "servant of the Lord". Those who claim to have the right to ignore these verses must therefore disqualify themselves from being servants of the Lord.

Paul lists four aspects of our attitude that need to be in place when we try to correct someone else's doctrine. Today's article will deal with the first three:

First, we are to be gentle to all. For "gentle" some expositors use the word "like a baby" meaning that we should be harmless, without guile and gentle as a baby would be! The Greek word for "gentle" in this passage is also used by Paul to describe his attitude to the Thessalonians: "we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children." (1Thessalonians 2:7). That's right - Paul expects us to display the same kind of gentleness towards those who are in opposition as a mother does towards her baby! Yes, I know that is very far from what many do, but this is the clear teaching of the Word. The reason for this lies in verses 26 and 27 which I will explain in the next couple of weeks.

Second, he expects us to be "able to teach". This is the same requirement he places on those who wish to be overseers in the church. "A bishop must be... apt to teach" (1Timothy 3:2). There is a huge difference between those who are skilled in teaching and those who know many facts. Someone who is skilled at teaching teaches others. One cannot be a teacher without ever coming face-to-face with students, learners or disciples. You cannot be a teacher in a vacuum, your study, or your academic ivory tower. You can only be a teacher when you impart wisdom (not knowledge) to disciples.

Unfortunately it is my observation that many (not all) who get involved in apologetics ministries are not skilled at teaching. They live in isolation since they believe that they alone have the truth. People like this often find it hard to relate to other people, let alone impart wisdom to others. Thus many of them sit in their glass houses, discern error and point fingers at those around them.

Let me be very clear on this: No-one who is not involved in a local church (no matter how small) and who does not regularly teach the Truth has the right to teach against error! There is no mention of a fault-finding, or critical ministry in the Bible. It is those who are "apt to teach" the Truth, who also point out the error and warn concerning the wolves.

The reason for this is that daily interface with others, especially weak believers helps to keep us humble, dependant on the Holy Spirit and in touch with the real issues of Christian living. There is nothing like relating to the weaknesses, problems and challenges of "normal" Christians to keep our ministries out of the area of theory and the academic. And there is nothing like the struggle to impart Biblical truth to struggling believers to keep us aware of our own frailty and dependence on the Lord. Every spectator on the sidelines of a sports game knows better how to play the game than anyone on the field! Yet there is no room for arm-chair critics in the church - only for those who are willing to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty with the vomit and diapers of new babes.

Thirdly we are to be "patient". Most commentators say of "patient" that it means to be "patient of ills and wrongs, forbearing" and "putting up with evil". That does not mean we must condone or accept wrongs and evil but rather, that we should be patient with those who are wrong. This goes with the previous point on being apt to teach.

One of the most important skills in teaching is patience since many disciples are slow to learn and often make mistakes. Patience is even more necessary when dealing with those who are in error since it takes a long time to turn a ship around that is on the wrong course. Teaching babes is relatively easy as they are often a "blank slate" on which we can simply write the truth. But when dealing with those who are in error, we must first delete the error before we can begin to write the truth. This takes much more patience than teaching spiritual babes. If you do not have the patience to teach young Christians, then you will also not have the patience to correct those who are into error.

Let me hasten to emphasize: I am not condoning error or heresy, neither am I unaware of the enormous damage false teachers have done and are doing. But unless we go about the task of defending the Truth in a godly way, we are wasting our time since the Lord is not working with us.

The fourth essential is humility or meekness. (Most translations use the word "gentleness" or "meekness"). Meekness is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:23. It is not weakness but flows from a life which is fully surrendered to the will of God. Those who strive in their own strength, trying to establish their own purposes are not meek, but are constantly agitated, arrogant, aggressive and antagonistic. Jonah is the best example of such a man. Paul before his conversion was also such and the Lord described him as kicking against the pricks.

Those who are meek have recognized their own weaknesses, are broken before Him and have come to a point of full surrender to the Lord. They do not have to prove anything but are simply instruments in the hands of the Almighty. Meekness flows first from an awareness of God's mercy towards us and a recognition of the fact that He has saved us and kept us by His grace alone: "Put them in mind to... speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Titus 3:1-3 KJV).

Secondly meekness flows from an awareness of our own faults and potential for sin and error. Those who arrogantly strive with others act as though they themselves never make mistakes and as though they have all Truth: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted... For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Galatians 6:1,3 KJV).

Thirdly, meekness is a result of recognizing that we cannot change other people's minds, theology or attitudes. It is God alone who can do so (with the individual's cooperation). When we are deluded and overconfident and think that we can win the argument, prove how wrong the other person is and get him to change his thinking - we are arrogant and far from meek. This is typical of the schoolyard bully who twists his opponent's arm behind his back, forcing him to submit. Spouses do the same in marriage because they have not learnt that there is not a single person on this earth who can change the heart, mind or attitude of someone else. God alone has that power.

Those who are in opposition (to the Truth) are "in the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2Timothy 2:26). They are not free agents to change their minds as they choose, but are trapped in a web of deceit, lies and error. (How they got there is another story). According to the Bible they are imprisoned and bound. To get angry with such people is a waste of time; they sold their freedom for expediency, popularity or money. They cannot change unless the Lord intervenes. When we understand that, our attitude towards them has to change from one of judgment to one of pity and mercy.

Why did Jesus not debate Pilate? Surely He could prove His innocence and the illegality of the trial. Yet, He said nothing. The key lies in Jesus' words to Pilate: "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). Jesus recognized where the true power lay. Those who fight with men have forgotten that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places "(Ephesians 6:12).

This does not mean that we should just sit back and wait for things to happen. The Lord uses men to work as His co-workers. Some of us plant, others water but the Lord gives the increase - and unless He does, nothing will happen in the lives of others. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

In dealing with those in error, we need to give a sound, logical and Biblical reason for the Truth. We need to be skilled workmen who divide the Word correctly. But the rest is up to the Lord: "...if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil" (2Timothy 2:25).

We cannot claim that God must deliver them or that he has to honor our word and cause the seed to grow. Paul uses the word "perhaps / peradventure" indicating that it is entirely up to God. Having sown the seed, we need to leave the rest up to Him. He has to give them repentance. Once they find repentance, then they will know the truth. Once they know the truth they need to come to their senses and escape the Devil's trap. Sadly, many do come to know the truth but choose to stay in the snare of the Devil for the same reasons they were entrapped in the first place.

Thus we have three people in the equation: The speaker of truth, God, and the individual in error. Even if the first two do everything necessary, the person in error may still choose to remain in bondage. The speaker of Truth is only one third of the equation and we must understand and accept that we cannot control, manipulate, cajole or force people to change.

Our true attitude and motive is often revealed when people choose to continue in error, even once they have been given Truth. Only those who weep and mourn for those who choose to continue in error had the right to speak in the first place. Those who hurl accusations, malign, slander and feel a sense of justification had no right to speak.

Should we then not point out error and name those who propagate error? What about Jesus cleansing the temple and his comments about the Pharisees? I will get to these questions in the next article but for now, let's check our attitude. Are we speaking from a heart of brokenness, humility, love, compassion and pity or from a platform of pride and superiority - "God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector" (Luke 18:12).

(To be continued)

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