

Contentiously Contending 2

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of contending for the faith with the right method and attitude, avoiding foolish and ignorant disputes, and discerning between seekers of truth and those who are not.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:4, 2 Timothy 2:23, Titus 3:9, James 3:13

Topics: "Defending The Faith", "Spirit Led Wisdom"

Description

Anton Bosch emphasizes the importance of speaking and defending the truth in the church, urging believers to contend for the faith with the right method and attitude. He highlights Paul's instructions to avoid foolish disputes that lead to strife, focusing on edifying conversations rather than arguments. Drawing from Jesus' example, Bosch encourages discernment in engaging with those genuinely seeking truth versus those seeking to argue for the sake of argument. He underscores the need for believers to be led by the Spirit, exhibiting meekness, humility, and wisdom in all interactions.

Transcript

Speaking and defending the truth are some of the most important responsibilities of the church, its leaders and, of all believers. There are many who propagate error and there are a few who stand for doctrinal purity. But, as we established last week, we must contend for the faith by the right method and with the right attitude. To this end, Paul provides some very clear instructions:

We are to "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" (2Timothy 2:23). This does not only apply to our relationship with those who are likeminded but especially, to those who are of a different persuasion. Obviously we do not have disputes with those who believe like we do - the disputes are with those with whom we disagree. The context also makes it clear that this instruction applies when we relate to "those who are in opposition". 2Timothy 2:23 and with those who have been entrapped by the devil. (v 26).

Sometimes I think that many people who get into apologetic type ministries do so simply because they love an argument. Even if that was not what got them into this kind of work, it seems to be what motivates them. Many just love the excitement of the scrap and that they get their kicks out of proving how right they are and how wrong others are. I know a few who will disagree with anything one says - just to pick an argument. (If you are irritated by this article, you may well be one of these). Others enjoy the fact that engaging in debate makes them feel intellectual while others just must have the last word. Then there are those who just have to win every argument and who, like bulldogs cannot release once their jaws have

locked onto the prey.

Paul is specific that we are to avoid those arguments that lead to strife. Even as I write, I know someone is rushing to remind me that Paul refers to "foolish and ignorant disputes" and that arguments about the truth cannot be "foolish and ignorant". The fact is that it is the process of dispute or argument itself that is foolish and ignorant, not the subject. On several occasions, Paul warns Timothy not to argue over words and the Law but rather to concentrate on things that are edifying. (1Timothy 1:4, 4:7). In 1Timothy 6:4-5, Paul links this argumentative attitude with pride. He instructs Titus to do the same: "But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned." (Titus 3:9-11). This does not mean that we should not defend the truth, or even take a strong position against error. The problem Paul is addressing, is the argumentative spirit which is often a sign of immaturity. In 2 Timothy 22 & 23, Paul links argumentativeness with youthful lusts since it is the younger men who tend to love the fights. Maturity brings a meekness and wisdom that restrains the carnal instinct to fight.

The Scribes loved to squabble. Their whole lives centered around argument, debate and questioning. They often tried to engage Jesus in endless arguments, but Jesus knew better than waste His time arguing with people who were not really interested in the truth. He would exchange a few questions with them but would quickly close the discussion by homing in on a very important flaw in their argument or by pointing out the hypocrisy in their statements. Jesus would spend endless hours teaching His disciples and others who really wanted to know the truth. He was infinitely patient with the sinners, the weak and the genuine "seekers". Yet, He had no time to waste on those who were arrogant, self-seeking and opinionated. One of the most important skills we need is to discern between those who really want to know the truth and those who are simply seeking an endorsement for their own theories and error.

It seems to me that we often forget that our calling is not to win arguments, but to teach, make disciples and clearly define the truth for those who are disciples or really want to be disciples. Many Christians will spend endless hours arguing with JW's and Athiests, knowing full well that the other person is not really interested in the truth. It is simply a waste of time. I think it was Josh MacDowell who teaches to ask the evolutionist or atheist the following question: "If I can prove that God exists and that He created all things, would you believe on Him and surrender your life to Him?". Most of the time the response will be "No". So then, what is the purpose of a protracted argument if the other party is not really interested in knowing the Truth. (The Person). There is no point - don't waste your time. Rather give him the Gospel as clearly and logically as possible and leave it there. Mostly, the other person will be quite happy to be rid of you by now. The Hypocrites did not stick around to debate Jesus on the intricacies of the Law after he said: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7).

It seems to me that the difference between Jesus and us is that everything He said was led by the Spirit while we often respond out of our fleshly desires to prove ourselves. If only we could be led by the Spirit on every occasion to discern whether we are dealing with an honest seeker of truth or not. But even more important is that we be led by the Spirit to say the right things and to stop arguing before we begin to war in the flesh, against the flesh. But even more important is that we exhibit the right attitude of meekness, humility and wisdom.

Please take a few minutes to consider whether the wisdom you often display is true, heavenly wisdom, or the false, earthly and demonic wisdom: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by

good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (James 3:13-18). Indeed, both arguments may appear wise and clever and both may even be founded on the Bible, but one is Godly and one is demonic.

(To be continued)

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