

Being Valiant for the Truth

Our reading from Jeremiah chapter 9 describes the failing of Israel:

“They bend their tongues like the bow for lies: but **they are not valiant for the Truth** upon the earth, for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith Yahweh” (Jer. 9:3).

There is a need then, to be Valiant for the Truth – and Israel were not doing this. The principle is also echoed by Jude, who exhorts the brethren:

“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” (Jude 3).

It is clear then that the faithful must both know what “the truth” is and be valiant in contending for it.

THE TRUTH

Sometimes our detractors describe us as being “arrogant” because we say that we have the Truth, and “other Christians” do not. As one of our adversaries has it: “we don’t have a monopoly of the Truth” – and who are we to judge others who worship Jesus just as sincerely as we do?

The root of the mischief – for that is what it is – is that our position is mis-stated. We do not say that of our own selves “we have the Truth”. Rather, we say that the Bible has the Truth, and we believe the Bible with all deference and humility – just as our adversaries are at liberty to do, if they so choose. It is perfectly true to say that “we don’t have a monopoly on the Truth” – but our God does. As it is written: “Yea, let God be True, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

As we have often cited, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God is Truth. As he said in his prayer for his disciples: “Sanctify them through thy Truth: thy word is Truth” (Jno. 17:17). Whereas Truth is sometimes portrayed as a subjective thing, with “one man’s truth being another man’s heresy,” these words of the Master demonstrate that there is a fixed and absolute standard of Truth – which is the Word of God. And by definition, that which differs from that Word is not Truth. Hence it is said of those who forsake it, that they: “concerning the Truth have erred” (2 Tim. 2:18). And again, that they “erred from the Truth” (Jas. 5:19). Concerning teachers who preach something different to Apostles, it was prophesied: “... they shall turn away their ears from the Truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:4). Here is the vital principle: “no lie is of the Truth,” (1 Jno. 2:21) and that which contradicts the True Words of God is by definition a lie.

But what of those “sincere Christians” who have a different point of view to ourselves? Surely it is unChristlike to speak against others who just don’t see things as we do? Actually, no! This is the teaching of Messiah:

“... they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch”. (Mat. 15:14).

A blind man cannot have a “point of view” – he can see nothing. Those who would brand us as being “unChristlike” should examine what Christ actually said. Men close their eyes to the things of the Truth (Acts 28:27), for the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14). A person who closes their eyes cannot have a vision of what is before them. They need to anoint their eyes with the eyesalve of the Word, so that they can see (Rev. 3:18). Only then can they have a legitimate “point of view”.

THE GOSPEL TRUTH

The Word of Truth comes to us through the Gospel being preached. Hence that Word is styled in Scripture as: “the Truth of the Gospel” (Gal. 2:14, Col. 1:5). The Gospel is defined as “the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ”, which it was necessary for the hearers of Philip to understand and believe in order to be baptised (see Acts 8:12). The BASF describes those two aspects very succinctly and scripturally. It thus epitomises the principles of the Gospel.

Sometimes the issue is raised as to how much a person needs to understand in order to be validly baptized. The Scriptures contain both “first principles” and “solid food” (Heb. 5:12): it is the first principles that need to be understood to lay a foundation for repentance from dead works (Heb. 6:1). Those who do this, are said to “believe and know the Truth” (1 Tim. 4:3), for they have “come unto the knowledge of the Truth” (1 Tim 2:4).

Again, is sometimes asserted that a person doesn’t need to have a particularly detailed knowledge in order to express belief and repentance in submitting to Baptism. But such forget that Israel were “destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). It is possible to not have enough knowledge to be saved – but it is not possible to have too much knowledge! And this assertion overlooks that it is necessary to “believe” the first principles: “he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mrk 16:16, see also 2 Thes. 2:12). But what is it that must be believed? As we defined above, the “things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” – and it is a summary of those things that provide the Statement of our Faith.

UNDERSTANDING AND WORKS

There is a need then, to have an understanding of, and belief in, the principles that collectively form the Gospel. This is described as “the full assurance of understanding” (Col. 2:2), without which there can be no faith, or belief – for how can a man have faith in something he knows nothing about?

Sometimes the idea is expressed that we need to live out the principles of the Truth in our lives, rather than to just study the Bible. But this is a false dichotomy: the situation is not either/or, but both! We must “love in deed and in Truth” (1 Jno. 3:18) and be found “walking in Truth” (2 Jno. 4). And it logically follows that we cannot walk in the Truth, if we do not know what that Truth is! We must believe and understand the righteous principles

of the Gospel message, in order to “walk according to the Truth of the Gospel” (Gal. 2:14), and thereby “obey the Truth” (Gal. 3:1, 1 Pet 1:22). Yes, it is vital to live out the practical outworking of the Gospel believed, but it is also necessary for us to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of Truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Both aspects are necessary in order to please our Father and Maker.

A DELIGHT!

Another objection heard from time to time, is that we need to enjoy ourselves as well as doing Bible study. But such sentiments do not come out of the mouths of those who are lovers of the Truth (2 Thes. 2:10). The Apostle Paul wrote: “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). And again, the Psalmist:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ***But his delight is in the law of Yahweh;*** and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:1-2, Psa. 119:97).

To study the Scriptures is not a chore to lovers of the Truth. It is a “delight”! Often we hear folk say concerning a novel or some other book that “it was so absorbing I couldn’t put it down!” That is what the Bible is to the brethren of Christ. It absorbs us into itself, and engages the mind in spiritual things. Those of a spiritual mind will delight in it, and will be reluctant to put it down!

The Lord Jesus Christ taught that “the Truth shall make you free.” And as we have demonstrated, the Truth needs to be understood and believed (1 Tim. 4:3). As the Apostle wrote, we need to receive it “not as the word of men, but as it is in Truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thes. 2:13).

It is written by Paul to the believers at Colosse: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ...” (Col. 3:16). But logically, the word of Christ cannot dwell in us, unless we put it there! To study the Bible brings great enjoyment and pleasure to men of the Spirit, and it also provides wisdom, and a power by which we can be saved. To study the Word is not an optional extra for the more studious amongst us: everyone that is of the Truth will hear the Master’s word (Jno. 18:37). We disregard it therefore, at our peril!

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

It is a feature of true Brethren of Christ, that they are valiant in contending for the faith together. Hence Paul encouraged the believers at Philippi:

“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind ***striving together for the faith of the gospel***” (Phil. 1:27).

Whilst the modern “progressive” churches advocate an open fellowship, with mutual tolerance and respect for different beliefs and practices, the faithful members of Christ’s ecclesias will contend against such a thing. The true believers are not “of one mind” because they overlook their doctrinal differences, but rather because they have “obtained like precious faith with us [i.e. the Apostles], through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1). There is only “one faith” (Eph. 4:5), and that is what constitutes “the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42). That which differs from it, by definition, is not that which the Apostles taught, and there subsequently can be no fellowship with those who promote it.

The Apostle warned the elders of Ephesus that false brethren would arise: both from within their own company, and externally:

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves **enter in among you**, not sparing the flock. Also **of your own selves** shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears ...” (Acts 20:29-31).

It would appear that the Ephesian ecclesia heeded the warning of Paul: but they had another problem. Rather than to contend for the faith out of love of the Truth, it was evidently out of hatred for the error. Indeed, both are necessary, but the Ephesians had lost their first love:

“I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars ... Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because **thou hast left thy first love**. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy lampstand out of his place, except thou repent” (Rev. 2:2-5).

These members were valiant for the Truth, and they could not bear those who proved themselves to be false brethren – but they had lost the love that they had at the first, when the Apostle preached to them.

From the above, we can see how it is essential to have a knowledge of what Scripture reveals to be Truth. And knowing it, we must also “contend” for it – that is a command of Scripture, not an optional extra. But in contending, it is important to make sure that we don’t lose our first love, and remain on that narrow path which leads to the Kingdom of God.

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