

Ready to Fight?

by Bryan Gibson

We should never argue about the Scriptures—at least that’s what some people think. Our convictions, even those developed through diligent study, should remain our own. No effort should be made to convince others, because after all, religion is a “personal matter.”

Clearly, Paul and Barnabas did not have this mind; because when some came to Antioch teaching, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”, Paul and Barnabas “had no small dissension and debate with them” (Acts 15:2). Further debate was continued in Jerusalem (Acts 15:7), and the matter was resolved by appealing to both the explicit and implied teaching of God, and to examples approved by God (see all of Acts 15).

The New Testament writers, inspired by God, did not hesitate to argue the doctrinal issues of that day. Many of the epistles deal explicitly with false teachers and false teaching (e.g. Galatians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John). They judged every teaching and practice by the gospel first preached by the apostles (Galatians 1:6-9), “the pattern of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13), the things which were heard “from the beginning” (1 John 2:24). The concept, “it doesn’t matter what you believe,” was totally foreign to these men.

So what should we do when we see and hear teachings and practices that are clearly opposed to the truth taught in the gospel? We have no choice but to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Folks, the gospel is worth fighting for!

Don’t be alarmed by the mention of fighting. We’re not talking about a “knock down drag out.” We can contend without being contentious; we can argue without being argumentative. The following passage deals with our conduct toward those in opposition—read it carefully: “a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, 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, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26). There will be occasions when sharper words are necessary (Titus 1:10-14), but the above should be followed until circumstances dictate otherwise. Paul’s sermon to a group of idolaters in Acts 17 is a great example. He “contended earnestly for the faith,” but he didn’t launch an all out assault. He began by talking about how “religious” they were, mentioning how they had even made an altar to the unknown God (Acts 17:22-23). He then went on to tell them about the God they didn’t know (vv. 24-29), eventually telling them that they needed to repent of their idolatry, that one day they would be judged by Jesus Christ (vv. 30-31).

There will be times in these articles that we will speak against certain teachings and practices, using of course, the word of God as our standard. Hopefully, our readers can see the precedent for that in the Scriptures cited above. You may not agree with everything that

is said. You might even get upset enough to respond. That's fine, because we welcome the discussion and debate—especially if our aim is the same—to know and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why did Paul and others speak so boldly in defense of the truth? Because they believed! (2 Corinthians 4:13). That's what true believers do—they contend, while others just pretend.