

Does the Truth Need Defending?

Dub McClish

Introduction

It is becoming increasingly popular to take the position that the Truth does not need to be defended. In their mad rush to avoid what they label "negativism," some have taken the untenable stance that it is not even the Christian's responsibility to defend the Truth. Logan J. Fox credits the adoption of this premise as the first step he took in his surrender of the Truth:

The first step was the discovery that truth is self-validating and needs no external supports.... I still remember the night I decided that I did not need to carry truth on my frail shoulders, that it could stand by itself or it wasn't the truth. And so I unloaded the burden I had been carrying and said, 'Tonight I will go to sleep and not worry about truth.' With what relief and joyful ecstasy I opened my eyes in the morning to find that truth had survived the night without my help! I have never since worried about defending truth.... I cannot exaggerate the importance this has had for me.... (p. 17).

Perhaps few have more completely made "shipwreck of the faith" than Logan Fox in recent years. In the years since Fox wrote this description of his theological pilgrimage, others have adopted this dictum that was of signal importance in releasing him from the "shackles" of "Church of Christism."

In an article titled, "Moslems or Christians?" Don McGaughey wrote:

The ironical aspect of such tragic dealings on the part of the Medieval Church, is that they were done in the name of "defending the faith." The Medieval Ecclesiastics thought that God's word needed protection. It did not! It never has! God's word is living and active, and strong enough to defend itself. In seeking to defend the Word of God, these well-intentioned defenders, disarm the Holy Word by not allowing it to speak for itself (p. 3).

"Defensive" Lectureship?

In a 1972 editorial in the *Nashville Christian News*, the writer ridiculed one of the Colleges operated by brethren for having what he termed a "defensive" lectureship. The writer went on to opine that it was an indication of a lack of faith to be so concerned about apostasy. A church bulletin came across my desk a few months ago with an editorial titled, "Contending Earnestly for the Faith," with the following statements in it:

Wars have been fought in the name of "defending the faith." Others have taken the scriptures and, using them as their club, endeavored to beat their opposition into subjection. Fighting for the truth has sometimes taken a form of self-righteousness that says we know God's way or have all the answers: if you want salvation, join us. We must never mistakenly place ourselves in the place that only Christ must occupy. The fact is God's truth does not need defending.... We must simply proclaim it. It can defend itself.

It is interesting, to say the least, that the author would make such statements in an article purportedly teaching men how to contend for the faith.

Others would have Gospel papers eliminate all exposure of false doctrine and defence of the Truth, as indicated by the following from Guy N. Woods: "Superficial and shallow souls have often criticized our gospel papers because controversial matters often appear. Such people should instead thank God that there are those who love the truth sufficiently to contend for it" (p. 281).

Scripture Urges a Militant Defence

The idea that the Truth will triumph to the greatest possible degree and that the church will remain the church without strong defence of the Truth is patently erroneous as shown by the following:

First, the scriptures teach the possibility of apostasy for individuals (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 2:1–3; et al.) and for entire congregations (Rev. 2:5; 3:16, et al.). The foregoing quotations very nearly imply the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy for the church. The misguided souls who hold this view seem to believe in a supernatural control of some sort over the church that will automatically keep it doctrinally pure, whether we, as members of the body remain doctrinally sound or not. Both the teaching of Scripture and the lessons of history teach the opposite.

Second, God has chosen to use men as his instruments of Truth, both for revelation and for conservation. He revealed the "mystery" to select individuals who proclaimed it both orally and graphically (John 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:10–13; Gal. 1:12, et al.). While I doubt not that He could have **revealed** it **directly** to **all** men personally, the fact remains that He chose to use human instruments to herald the Truth (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:15; 2 Cor. 4:7, et al.). Likewise, He could have chosen to **defend** the Truth **directly** through all ages, but it is evident that He gave this responsibility to the same ones who are to proclaim it. Indeed, one does not faithfully proclaim the Truth if he fails to defend it when it comes under attack. Those who heap ridicule upon good men and women who are concerned about the cancer of liberalism, which is eating at the vitals of the church, calling us "saviors of the church" and the like, may someday look back and wish there had been more of us.

Third, if insistence upon the need to defend, as well as to proclaim, the Faith is "much ado about nothing," then why preach at all? If we are not to defend the Faith because "truth is its own best defender," then what is the purpose of any preaching at all? By the same logic,

Truth should be "its own best proclaimer" and **all** teaching efforts (including sermons, books, classes, personal evangelism, et al.) are both superfluous and wasteful, therefore foolish. After all, men have the Bible; why trouble them with any preaching or teaching? Such is the logical conclusion of this thinking. The conclusion is correct, but its premise is egregiously flawed.

Fourth, the only ultimate justification for all our evangelistic efforts is to propagate the Truth that makes men free (John 8:31–32). Not just any message will do this, but only **the truth**, which Christ identified as the Word of God (17:17). Stated another way, the world cannot be saved apart from the Gospel (Mark 16:15–16; Rom. 1:16). Half-truths leave men in bondage, and a perverted Gospel results in damnation (Gal. 1:6–9). Against such a background, the maintenance of the purity of New Testament Truth and doctrine is of surpassing importance—which implies opposing those who corrupt it.

Fifth, the Scriptures abound with exhortations to defend the Truth. Consider the following:

1. Paul commanded the Romans to mark the ones among them who were living "contrary to the doctrine" they had learned (Rom. 16:17).
2. He urged the Corinthians to "stand fast in the faith" (1 Cor. 16:3).
3. He instructed the Ephesian saints to equip themselves fully with the Truth and to take up the "sword of the Spirit," God's Word, in order to withstand the "wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11–17).
4. He told the Philippians that he was "set for the defence of the gospel" (was Paul's behavior exemplary or not?). Further, they were all to "stand fast" as one in "striving for the faith of the gospel." Only by such behavior would their manner of life be worthy of the Gospel (Phi. 1:16, 27). Paul was clearly not of the non-defender persuasion. His letters to Timothy and Titus abound with principles relating to defending the Truth:
 - a. Timothy was to remind the brethren that they must not teach a different doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3).
 - b. A good servant of Christ will warn about apostasy and contrast the Truth with error (4:1–6).
 - c. A preacher's salvation depends upon his continued attention both to his personal and his doctrinal correctness (v. 16).
 - d. Timothy was to reprove publicly even elders who erred (5:20).
 - e. Paul depicted one who teaches a different doctrine and argues with sound words as a proud ignoramus, a provoker of ungodly strife, and a man of corrupted mind who has abandoned the Truth (vv. 3–5).

- f. Timothy was to faithfully teach the message he had received of Paul to dependable men who would likewise teach it to others (2 Tim. 2:1-2).
- g. Before one can be approved of God he must handle the Word of Truth correctly (v. 15).
- h. Those who err concerning the Truth would overthrow the faith of some saints, therefore Timothy was to correct such in meekness (vv. 18, 25).
- i. Paul strictly charged Timothy to "preach the word," – including reproving and rebuking – in all circumstances, because the time would come when the saints would turn away from "sound doctrine." In spite of this, the faithful preacher should be willing to suffer whatever necessary to accomplish his work (4:1-5).
- j. Elders are not only to "exhort" in the sound doctrine," but also to "convict the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9).

Many other passages emphasize this same theme, which is one of the most prevalent and persistent themes of the New Testament, namely, that the Truth of God's Word must be guarded, protected, and defended at all costs when it is opposed.

Sixth, to declare that the Faith needs no defence is to stamp countless courageous efforts of the past and present as wasted. Stephen died needlessly by this reasoning (Acts 7:52-60). Paul was certainly misinformed and should never have spoken so rudely to Elymas (13:8-12), nor should he have appeared before Felix, Festus, or Agrippa in defence of the Faith and of his own behavior relative to it (24:10-21; 25:7-8; 26:1-29). Paul should never have rebuked Peter (Gal. 2:11), and Priscilla and Aquila were out of order to take Apollos aside and expound unto him the "way of God more accurately" (18:26). To negate the need for defending the Faith is to sit in judgment of the lives and works of all the faithful prophets of both the Old and the New Testaments, along with every faithful uninspired Gospel preacher of the past and present.

Conclusion

This *the-Truth-needs-no-defense* premise strikes at the very foundation of the nature of the Truth. Truth, in whatever field of study, never ceases to be truth just because men ignore, deny, or forget it, but this is no excuse for allowing it to be mutilated and corrupted while we remain mute. Such is a grievous dereliction of duty. The very suggestion smacks much of seeking the favor of men more than of God (Gal. 1:10). Rather than evidencing a lack of faith if one **defends** the Truth, the **anti-defender** is the one lacking sufficient faith to obey plain, repeated statements of Scripture and to follow the example of the Lord and the apostles in their proclamation of the Word. It is hardly a demonstration of faith to stand silently by and watch the Truth be ruthlessly slaughtered. I believe as strongly as anybody in the ultimate victory of the Lord and

the glorification of his bride, but such promises do not guarantee a doctrinally pure body apart from a consistent effort on our part to keep it pure.

Guy N. Woods is correct in his observation: "If we do not stand up for the truth, there will eventually be no truth among us to stand up for!" (p. 281). Edmund Burke's famous quotation is also appropriate: "All that is necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing." Finally, brethren, "Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Works Cited

Fox, Logan J. "Destiny or Disease?" *Voices of Concern*, ed. Robert Meyers (St. Louis, MO: Mission Messenger, 1966).

McGaughey, Don. *Action*. Ed. Jimmy Lovell. May 1967.

Woods, Guy N. "Editorial." *Gospel Advocate*. Ed. Guy N. Woods. May 3, 1973.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in the January 24, 1974, issue of *Words of Truth*, Gus Nichols, editor.]

Attribution: From *TheScripturecache.com*, owned and administered by Dub McClish.