

How to Contend for The Faith

(without Being Contentious)

LESSON 3

In our last lesson, we discussed how to contend for the faith in a Christ-like manner by asking, “*What can I learn from the person with whom I differ?*” We considered that, if we are truly humble in manner, we could learn:

1. That in some points *they* might be right, and in some points *we* might be wrong.
2. That our position may have failed to properly handle all the facts.
3. That we had not noticed the potential for our own position to be misunderstood.

Admitting these three things, when we have discovered them to be the case, proves that we truly are willing to learn the truth. And this also opens the door for the one with whom we disagree to also hear the truth from us.

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Having considered, first, how to do our Christian duty toward the person with whom we differ and, second, how to learn all that we can from them, we're now ready to discuss a final question--a question that is only right to ask after we have answered the first two . . .

III. How can I cope with the person with whom I differ?

A. Remember the goal.

1. We must remember that it is our God-given call to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). No genuine believer can exempt themselves from that duty--no matter how hard a duty it may, at times, be.
2. But we must also remember that the goal is not to win an argument. No one has ever been argued into salvation against his or her will. Rather, we're to seek to win a person to the truth of a God who has shown mercy to them, and rescue them from the terrible loss that results from error. James 5:19-20 says, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” Ours is ultimately a ‘rescue mission’--not a ‘debate mission’. Our motive in defending the faith is always to be one of love. As Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:3-5; “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia--remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith . . .”

B. Take your stand on the authority of God's word (which alone is the rule of our faith and practice).

1. Labor to make sure that you use God's word accurately and in a contextually sound manner. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

2. Do not allow yourself to become distracted by unbiblical matters. Be strategic; and choose your battles wisely. “But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:16).
3. Do the careful study of God’s word on your own, so that when the person with whom you disagree reads God’s word for themselves, they will find that what you said truly was what God meant. We want them to be like good Bereans--“in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:10-11).
4. Seek to know “the whole counsel of God”, so that you will express biblical truth in the context of that whole counsel (Acts 20:27). This will keep you alert to those times when the person you are seeking to win to the truth misuses Scripture. An example of this is when someone quotes Matthew 7:1 to silence you--“Judge not, that you be not judged”--without seeing that verse in the context of vv. 15-20. All of God’s word works together as a whole.

C. Use sound reasoning.

1. Remember that human reasoning must be subservient to God’s revealed truth. “You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies . . .” (Psalm 119:98; see also vv. 99-100; and Psalm 53:1. You never need to fear an appeal to “reason” because God’s words will never prove to be “irrational”. “The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, you shall preserve them from this generation forever” (Psalm 12:6-7).
2. Work to show that the affirmation of God’s revealed truth for which we are contending is in keeping with the body of Christian faith as a whole. To put it another way, show how denying the truth for which we contend will, by implication, lead to the denial of other truths of the faith. (An example of this is how denying the Trinity will also result in the denial of the deity of Christ, and then, in turn, the denial of His ability to serve as our atoning sacrifice, and finally to a denial of the whole basis for our salvation.)

D. Make an appropriate appeal to history and creed.

1. Show that the truth for which we contend is in line with the historically accepted standards of orthodoxy (i.e., the historic creeds and catechisms).
2. Learn how those in the past who have departed from the standards of the faith have made ‘shipwreck’ (1 Timothy 1:19-20), or have overthrown the faith of others (2 Timothy 2:16-17).

E. Above all, depend on the Holy Spirit through prayer.

1. He is the one who is able to give us the words to speak that cannot be argued against. “You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matthew 10:18-20).
2. He alone is the only one who is able to work in the heart of the person with whom we differ and bring conviction to their hearts concerning the truth. As Jesus taught us; “. . . He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11).