

Defending the Defense of the Faith

As pastors, the bulk of our service to Christ relates to His Word. We are to preach it (2 Tim. 4:2), teach it (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 2:1), teach *all* of it (Acts 20:27), handle it correctly (2 Tim. 2:15), read it (1 Tim. 4:13), meditate on it (2 Tim. 2:7), model it (Titus 2:7-8), suffer for it (2 Tim. 2:9), and be guided by it (Psalm 119:105).

We are also to defend it. This part is where we might get uncomfortable. Maybe we fear the label of being “negative” or “judgmental”. Maybe we don’t want to be lumped in with the “discernment ministries” that seem to make criticism their bread and butter. Either way, a casual look through Scriptures will show us we need to take seriously the task of defending the faith. Here’s why.

First, the example of the Apostles and early Church reveal that defending the faith is a central task of the Church’s work on earth. There is so much in the NT focusing on defending the faith. Whether it was Paul and the Judaizers (Galatians 5:11-12), John and the Gnostics (1 John 4:1-3), Jude and the libertines (Jude 3-4), Peter and the charlatans (2 Peter 2:14-15), much energy was devoted to keeping doctrine sound in the Church. Renald Showers’ recounted an insightful article in his introductory comments to his book *The Foundations of Faith*:

“Many years ago I read an article that so impressed me I have never forgotten its content. At the beginning of a seminary course on New Testament studies, an instructor told his students that they would work together on one major project that semester. They would move systematically through the New Testament to categorize every area of truth and determine how many times each area is addressed. Their goal was to find the one truth emphasized more than any other in the New Testament. When they completed the project, they were amazed to see that warning against false doctrine is emphasized more than any other issue – even more than love, unity, and experience.”

With so much Biblical text on this issue are we smart to consider if this vital part of our commission has been overlooked? If the early Church was forced to defend the faith so often shouldn’t it be unusual for us to do it so little? Perhaps we need to imitate our spiritual ancestors and more actively warn against false doctrine. Paul did it every day with tears (Acts 20:31)

Second, the Church is commanded to defend the faith. It is one thing to follow the pattern of the early Church in defending the faith, but, it is another thing when we realize it’s required. Jude 3 says, “*Dear friends...I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*”. Timothy was instructed by Paul to “*guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you*” (1 Timothy 2:14). The Ephesian elders were warned that “*savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from among your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after themselves*.” (Acts 20:29-30). Titus learned that he must “*refute those who oppose [sound doctrine]*” (Titus 1:9).

From these few passages we learn two things. First, God has given truth to believers. Second, possessing truth is a trust from God in which our fidelity requires defending it.

No church would be considered faithful without preserving the integrity of biblical doctrine. “*What you heard from me keep as the pattern of sound teaching...Guard the good deposit...*” (2 Tim. 1:13, 14). We possess the truth about God which is why the Church is the “*pillar and foundation of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15). It has been placed in our hands and with it has come the expectation to keep it free of corruption.

Thirdly, since Satan continues his campaign to deceive, the Church must continue its campaign for truth. To put it succinctly: Because Satan is at work so is the Church.

Truth is not really what comes to mind when we think of our world. Nothing is what it seems and it seems everyone lies. Big lies, little lies, half-truths, exaggerations, are commonplace. Strangely we have come to expect it, tolerate it, and are just plain used to it. Why is it like this? Biblically we understand that the world is run by the Father of lies (John 8:44). First John 5:19 says, “*the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*” His umbrella of deception spreads over all the world, “*The great dragon...that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.*” (Revelation 12:13). Someday his lies will come to an end: “*He [an angel] threw him [Satan] into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.*” (Revelation 20:3). But until then he sends his wolves out dressed like sheep (Matthew 7:15) to help him keep the hearts of unbelievers blinded by his lies (2 Cor. 4:4). They are his ambassadors who masquerade as messengers of truth while in reality they are workmen of deceit (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) spreading doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

Such an aggressive crusade of deception must be met by an equally aggressive crusade for truth. When the truth is suppressed (Rom. 1:18), censored (Acts 5:28-29), or distorted (Acts 20:30) we must not be mutes. Un-sheath the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) and slice out the lies away from the truth! We are sons of light (Eph. 5:8) and we must shine forth before men who are groping about in the Enemy’s kingdom of darkness (Matthew 5:14-16; Col. 1:13)! The Enemy’s lies cannot be allowed to hold their ground.

Fourthly, the glory of the truth is worthy of it. Why is God’s truth glorious? Because it’s the truth of our glorious God! How can we let His glory be tampered with and not refute attacks coming against doctrines of Him? They who teach falsely may rob God, but, would not our silence make us their accomplices? Do we think so little of our great big God and His glory to be hushed while our doctrines suffer distortion? Surely the four magnificent Seraphim in heaven who endlessly declare God’s glory scoff at us if we do not uphold the glory of God’s name on earth, “*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power...*” (Revelation 4:11). How unworthy falsehoods are and how worthy truth is! Idols are lies to be smashed (Dt. 7:5) but truth must be held high as a banner. Punish deception with the truth and tear down any altar of ideas opposing the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). While they suppress God’s truth we will elevate it (Rom. 1:18). While they exchange it for lies we will not let it go (Rom. 1:25). God thinks a man of truth worthy to defend (Ps. 41:11-12) and we should see it worthy to defend the truth of God.

Fifthly, sound doctrine creates sound Christians. There is not a spiritually healthy Christian who is not well fed by the Word of God. When accurately taught and applied God’s Word will bring forth fit Christians. A believer without the Word is like a baby without a breast - both are doomed to spiritual starvation, stunted growth and malnourishment. No one would tolerate depriving a little child of food, and no one should tolerate depriving God’s children of their milk and meat (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:11-14).

Second Timothy 3:16-17 connects the necessity of God’s Word to make a believer fit for service: “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” First Peter 2:2 connects God’s word to growing when he says, “*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*” Hebrews 5:13-14 shows the graduation from milk to solid food for growing believers, “*Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish between good and evil.*”

Let us preach all the word of God and leave out nothing that would help our brothers and sisters’ spiritual constitution (Acts 20:20, 27). In the beginning the Lord instructed Adam to care for the Garden to make it flourish. Here we are with our own gardens, those branches of the Lord connected to Him who is their vine (John 15:5). By planting and watering (1 Cor. 3:8) with God’s Word they may flourish (Psalm 1:2-3) and bring forth fruit to God’s glory (John 15:8; Php. 1:11). Let us strive among them with the Word of God until they are formed into Christ’s image (Col. 3:10) and He is formed in them (Galatians 4:19). In this way we will present sound men - not babes - who are perfect and mature at His coming (Col. 1:28).