

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

Volume 7, Issue 10

October 2009

Defenders of the Faith

Art Nelson

Introduction

I am sure that you have, like me, run into a number of people who want to “defend the faith” by constantly condemning others who have a different understanding of Scriptures that may violate their application of doctrine. There are books and websites in abundance that desire to keep “the doctrine pure”. They are very quick to point out the shortcomings of those that they believe have endorsed a doctrinal position different from the way that they understand the Scriptures. Some even condemn the person and not just the doctrine; making personal judgments based on primarily unfounded premises or lack of understanding and further dividing the Body of Christ with their accusations.

I want to ask you a question. Has Jesus ever asked anyone to defend Him? I think the answer to that is no. He would not even let His disciples defend Him when He was taken before His Crucifixion. When He was questioned by Pilot, Jesus answered him with this:

John 18:36 NASB Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

When Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this realm, He meant that it was not a part of our natural reality but was part of spiritual reality; that is was not visible to the eyes but could only be seen by the spirit. Therefore, the fighting arena is in the spirit realm and not in the natural. Paul said this plainly:

Ephesians 6:12 NASB For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Our struggle is not against people; but, instead, against spiritual powers and rulers. Any attempt to focus our fight on natural reality and the problems associated with people will result in the loss of focus on spiritual reality.

Light and Dark

Prior to Jesus the world resided in darkness. Jesus brought light into the darkness.

John 8:12 NASB Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

John 12:46 NASB "I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness."

John 1:4-5 NASB In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. (5) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

One of the interesting things about light is that it has substance. Whether we consider it photons or a wave, it still has substance. Darkness does not. Darkness is merely the absence of light. You don't fight the darkness; you turn on the light.

As we walk with Jesus, His light fills us and we become light to the world also.

2 Corinthians 4:6 NASB For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Ephesians 5:8-9 NASB for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (9) (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth),

Matthew 5:14-16 NASB "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; (15) nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. (16) "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

We see from what Jesus said above that the way our light shines before men is by our good works. When others see them, it causes them to glorify the Father. We do not earn our salvation by good works, rather, salvation, which is the light of Jesus shining in us and coming forth from us, results in us doing good works.

Our works, what we do, reveals whether we are walking in darkness or light. It is not what we *say* but rather what we *do*.

1 John 1:5-7 NASB This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. (6) If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (7) but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 2:9-11 NASB The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. (10) The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. (11) But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

If we “practice the truth” we walk in light; if not, we walk in darkness. Our deeds reveal whether we love light are darkness.

John 3:19-21 NASB "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. (20) "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (21) "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

How are evil deeds exposed? By shining the light on them.

Ephesians 5:11-13 NASB Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; (12) for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. (13) But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

How do we shine light on evil deeds? It is not be attacking the evil doers.

Romans 12:21 NASB Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We overcome evil with good. We have taken a defensive stand against evil as it encroaches upon us. So we become “defenders of the faith”, constantly battling against the evil. However, we need to take the offensive; that is, we overcome by doing good.

Jesus said this:

Matthew 5:39 NASB "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."

See, we are not resisting the person, but, rather, the spiritual powers behind the person. We overcome the evil work that these spiritual powers do through people by doing good. In the natural, if you slap me on my left cheek, I'll slap you on your right. That is a typical human response. It requires the supernatural work of the Spirit of God in me for me to put to death my natural fleshly response and instead respond by turning the other cheek. This is walking in the light and exposes the evil deed of the one who slapped me.

Contending for the Faith

There is a balance that must be achieved between defensive and offensive actions on our part. We see it repeatedly in the book of Acts and the Epistles. There is a time and place for contending for the faith. Jude even felt that it was necessary to write about it because of ungodly people who had infiltrated the assembly of believers.

Jude 1:3-4 NASB Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. (4) For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the

grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

There were two primary characteristics of these ungodly people--(1) they used the grace of God to cover their evil deeds, approving sensuality, lusts, and indulgences; and (2) they denied our Lord Jesus as Master and as Lord. Notice that this does not focus on what we call “doctrine” but rather on what they did.

Out of Balance

It is easy to get out of balance in this area as many have done. It is a poor testimony to others and causes us to lose focus on what we should be doing. The best example of this in the Scriptures is the Church in Ephesus as addressed by Jesus in Revelation.

Revelation 2:1-7 NASB "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: (2) 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; (3) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. (4) 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. (5) 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent. (6) 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (7) 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

The Church in Ephesus was a great “defender of the faith”. As the original Apostles died, many heresies from false teachers and false apostles began coming into the Church. Jesus does not condemn them for exposing the darkness. He even says that they worked hard at doing that. What He does have against them is that they lost their primary focus—they left their first love and no longer did the deeds that they did previously. In other words, they concentrated so much on defending the faith and exposing the false that they neglected their primary directive or work. This was serious enough that Jesus said that if they didn't get back into balance and re-focus on their primary work, He would remove their lampstand; that is, they would cease to be a Church before Him.

Since this is so serious and has application to us, we should ask ourselves, “what does it mean to leave our first love and what type of deeds should we be doing?” This is actually quite simple; but, we have complicated the simplicity of Christ with too much activity. What did Jesus give us as our primary directive?

Matthew 28:19-20 NASB "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

We call this “the Great Commission” but we have forced our understanding of this into too small

of a mold. We are not to make “converts” but we are to make “disciples”. That is our primary objective, our “first” work. We disciple nations one person at a time. Our first work is evangelism and discipleship. This is not a “go to Heaven” message but a life change word where we learn to walk in light.

According to Jesus' commission, making disciples involves two things: baptizing and teaching, We are to teach them to observe all the commands of the Lord. This continues to the end of the age.

What is the primary commandment of the Lord? He called it a new commandment—that we love one another as He has loved us. If we are out of balance in our defending the faith, we have lost the love that we should have for one another.

I hope that you hear the voice of the Lord in this Teaching Letter. We do need to come back into balance and do the first works. We need to get on with the commission that the Lord has given us and not be distracted from its fulfillment.

© 2003-2009 by Art Nelson and [Lifestream Teaching Ministries](http://www.LifestreamTeaching.com)

Previous issues of Present Truth are on the website: www.Lifestreamteaching.com

For comments or questions contact Art Nelson at this address:

artnelson@lifestreamteaching.com

You have permission to copy and distribute these materials provided:

1) no changes are made to the content, and, 2) they are not sold.

Removal instructions:

This is a free teaching letter, without cost or obligation.

If you have received this teaching letter in error or if you desire not to receive "Present Truth" teaching letter please reply with "remove" in the subject area.