

Is Truth Worth Fighting for?

1 Kings 18:27; Matthew 3:7-10; 1 Corinthians 4:8-10; Galatians 2:11-14

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No idea is more politically incorrect among today's new-style evangelicals than the old fundamentalist notion that *truth* is worth fighting for—including the essential propositions of Christian doctrine. In fact, many believe that arguments over religious beliefs are the most pointless and arrogant of all conflicts. That can be true—and *is* true in cases where human opinions are the only thing at stake. But where God's Word speaks clearly, we have a duty to obey, defend, and proclaim the truth He has given us, and we should do that with an authority that reflects our conviction that God has spoken with clarity and finality. This is particularly crucial in contexts where cardinal doctrines of biblical Christianity are under attack.

Incidentally, the core truths of Scripture are *always* under attack. Scripture itself clearly teaches that the main battleground where Satan wages his cosmic struggle against God is *ideological*. In other words, the spiritual warfare every Christian is engaged in is first of all a conflict between truth and error, not merely a competition between good and wicked deeds. The chief aim of Satan's strategy is to confuse, deny, and corrupt the truth with as much fallacy as possible, and that means the battle for truth is *very* serious. Being able to distinguish between sound doctrine and error should be one of the highest priorities for every Christian—as should defending the truth against false teaching.

Take such a stand today, however, and you will be scolded by a cacophony of voices telling you that you are out of line and you need to be quiet. The "war" metaphor simply doesn't work in a postmodern culture, they insist. Postmodern epistemologies start and end with the presupposition that any question of what's true or false is merely academic. Our differences are ultimately trivial. Only the tone of our discussion is *not* trivial. Every hint of militancy is considered inappropriate in these sophisticated times.

Taking a stand for the truth was equally unpopular in the first century. But that didn't stop the apostles from confronting error head on.

Take the apostle Paul for example. Paul was certainly fair with his opponents in the sense that he never misrepresented what they taught or told lies about them. But Paul plainly recognized their errors for what they were and labeled them appropriately. He spoke the truth. In his everyday teaching style, Paul spoke the truth gently and with the patience of a tender father. But when circumstances warranted a stronger type of candor, Paul could speak very bluntly—sometimes even with raw sarcasm (1 Corinthians 4:8-10). Like Elijah (1 Kings 18:27), John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7-10), and even Jesus (Matthew 23:24), he could also employ derision effectively and appropriately, to highlight the ridiculousness of serious error (Galatians 5:12). He was a sacred-cow tipper in the mold of Moses or Nehemiah.

Paul didn't seem to suffer from the same overscrupulous angst that causes so many people today to

whitewash every error as much as language permits; to grant even the grossest of false teachers the benefit of every doubt; and to impute the best possible intentions even to the rankest of heretics. The apostle's idea of "gentleness" was not the sort of faux benevolence and artificial politeness people today sometimes think is the true essence of charity. We never once see him inviting false teachers or casual dabblers in religious error to dialogue, nor did he approve of that strategy even when someone of Peter's stature succumbed to the fear of what others might think and showed undue deference to false teachers (Galatians 2:11-14).

Paul understood that truth is worth fighting for. He stood for the truth even when it was unpopular to do so.

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