

Earnestly Contend for the Faith

by Gordon C. Olson

INTRODUCTION

It is our duty to humbly testify of the glorious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we understand it, especially if our opinions are the result of long and continued study of the Word of God, well-seasoned with prayed for guidance and enlightenment. The religious world may be divided broadly into those who accept the Bible as an infallible revelation from God, and those who do not so regard it. On the one hand are those who cherish the Old and New Testaments as an authoritative communication from God, the only all-sufficient rule of faith and practice; that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" (or is God-breathed) and that "men spake from God, being moved (or borne along) by the Holy Spirit." On the other hand, those who assign a varying degree of inspiration to the writings of the Bible and who claim the right to select from its pages what they are to believe, passing by other portions, thus making the mind of man the criterion as to what is truth. We are very thankful for the many missionary minded and earnest churches throughout our land in various denominations who are standing uncompromisingly for the Bible as a supernatural revelation, and who are accomplishing much good to the glory of Christ and the blessing of the world, nevertheless we believe that the simple and positive doctrinal truths which General Baptists and some other groups have stood for several centuries are worthy of careful consideration.

I-CONTEND FOR THE WORD

Taking our stand for the infallible inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God, we earnestly contend for the revealed truths of the Godhead as a Trinity of infinite personal Beings; for the creation of the vast universe and the world by God, and of mankind with every bestowment of benevolence and happiness in association with his Creator under a wise government; for the tragic fact of man's fall into sin by a voluntary transgression of the known will and rightful claims of his Maker, with the woeful depravity of heart and life which followed and has been multiplied a thousand-fold in the downward course of the ages; for the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity through the virgin birth to enter our sphere of life as our Savior and Mediator. We, as General Baptists contend for the absolute universality of the atonement and suffering of Christ for the sine of the world of mankind in all ages, without any theological qualifications or reservations whatever, or that the Savior tasted death for every man in the same sense, so that all may come and partake of these infinite blessings and benefits; for His miraculous bodily resurrection from the grave, and His ascension into heaven in the same body in which He arose; for the coming of the Trinity in bearing witness to the fact of man's sin and to the glorious salvation made possible through Christ, and to bestow a vivid spiritual life upon those who would humble themselves in response to His warnings and pleadings.

II-CONTEND FOR FREE WILL

Although we recognize that man's depravity of heart tends strongly to lead him astray and presents a constant impediment to light and holy living, nevertheless we contend for the freedom of the human will from first to last and for the absence of any predestination or election to determine man's destiny for him. It is this self-determining power of the human will, in the light of intellectual perception of truth, that constitutes man a free moral agent and makes him responsible for his actions. In this endowment he bears his Creator's image, and could not lose it without ceasing to be a human being. Before a remedy can be applied to heal a given malady, there must first be a termination of those causes that brought about that condition. Sin is a missing the mark that God intended, a wrong choice of our own wills, a voluntary preference of supreme self-gratification as an end in life, which has brought us under condemnation and left unending defilement and chaos in our entire beings. The Gospel proposes a remedy for our condition, but of necessity requires the termination of that active disposition of will which has brought about this sorrow to God and wretchedness in man. Repentance, therefore, is the key to salvation, an absolute turning from all sin so that we are willing to be done with it forever, if God can find it possible to forgive us and stoop down to deliver us from bondage and corruption. So thorough-going and complete is repentance, that it involves an absolute consecration of ourselves according to all our moral light to the will of God, whereas before we were consecrated supremely to our own selfish gratification in defiance of the claims of God and our fellowmen. God does not accept what sinners have a mind to give and forgive what they voluntarily withhold!

III-CONTEND FOR GLORIOUS FAITH

Upon this we affirm that the faith that saves is not a cold and distant acceptance of Christ as a Savior from the penalty of our sins, so that we may go to heaven and avoid their eternal consequences, but rather, that the act of faith is a glorious actuality is our conscious experience which climaxes a period of longer or shorter duration, in which the sufferings of Jesus for our own sin became a powerful reality through the revelations of the Holy Spirit, so that we trembled at the agony of the cross and at the awfulness of our sins as they appeared in the gloom that issued forth from His broken heart. In this intimacy with the Savior's love--and no one truly has been saved without a wound from Jesus--we most tenderly trusted our whole case in His death because of our sine, or were given by the Father to enter in through the door of faith into an unforgettable actuality of blessing in the presence of the Godhead. It was not, strictly taking salvation by faith, a daring to believe, as though faith were some bold majestic stroke which determined man's destiny. It was not so much our accepting Christ, as complete humbling of ourselves in the penitent's prayer so that Christ actually accepts us personally into His very presence through His own sufferings, in which nearness we look up by faith into His tender broken countenance through tear-stained eyes and are happily conscious of our new-found union with Him as our Savior. Christ Himself became the door for us into the church which is His mystical body.

IV-CONTEND FOR NEW BIRTH

Instantly, upon this induced faith or laying hold of Jesus as our own personal Savior, all our past sins are completely and wonderfully forgiven by the Father. Note that it is our past sins only that can be forgiven. A future sin is a non-entity, or it does not exist as yet in the government of God, and therefore, cannot now be dealt with. The stream of sin has been broken off, and it was not planned that there were to be any future sins or rebellion against the loving Savior's heart, as we humble ourselves at His feet and were struck with awe at the price of our transgressions. To climax it all, the Holy Spirit now has the happy work to perform to purify our souls from all sin, and to fill us with His glorious presence. This we term regeneration, or the sanctification of the Spirit, or the baptism in the Holy Spirit--through which we partake of Divine life and become members of the body of Christ because we now have become animated by Christ as the Head of a living organism, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Negatively, then, our sinful beings have been cleansed by the Holy Spirit's applying the balm of Calvary in such a way that the sting of our conscience occasioned by sin is gone; sin's power over us has been broken and as weight upon our souls removed. Positively, the Holy Spirit has filled us to overflowing in His great presence, a submerging of our entire being, so to, speak, in His holy life so that we instantly spring forth into a newness of spiritual life which is not our own, but partaking of the life of the Godhead which is eternal. Growth in grace and knowledge of God can increase our capacity for the presence of the Divine life indefinitely, and this is the continued life of sanctification; but just as a small cup may be filled to overflowing as also can a huge fuel storage tank, although the quantity in the former may be only a small part of the quantity in the latter, just so, the new-born babe in Christ may be filled with the Spirit and likewise the most mature Christian, and yet the actual consciousness of the great life of the Godhead in the former is only a small part of that experienced by the latter. This process will no doubt continue forever in heaven, as the Infinite God is unveiled more and more to the redeemed of the earth. We believe, then, in a great and glorious first work of grace, with the need of seeking works of grace day by day if the Divine life is to be sustained within us, but no single second work of grace or the eradication of anything in our personalities. In the freshness of this heavenly experience the Father has expressed His desire that we undergo an outward and tangible ceremony to better fix upon our minds the true nature of the inward spiritual transaction that has taken place and to give testimony before all men, that we have completely died to our old ways of sin and have been raised again to a glorious newness of life in Christ Jesus--that we pause in deep reverence to be baptized in water, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

V - CONTEND FOR FAITHFULNESS

The New Testament reveals with utmost urgency the absolute necessity of persevering in a state of sanctification, through faith in Christ by means of the power of the Holy Spirit, unto the end of our earthly pilgrimage if we are to finally enter heaven's portals and sing the songs of the redeemed--we must "with purpose of heart...cleave unto the Lord," not unto sin. Although ail within us was subdued under the power of God in the shadow of the cross, never-the-less our constitutions are not so altered that we cannot again choose the course of sin and become entangled once more in bondage to selfishness, and come under condemnation and be finally lost, for indeed sin must be condemned in whoever

commits it. Therefore, we are to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," resisting the devil and the works of darkness in the name of Jesus and keeping our own body in subjection through a walk in the guidance and power of the Spirit of God, continually directing our minds to the things above and not allowing worldly things to usurp an improper place in our God requires in His children a perfection of disposition like unto His own -- not a life without fault. What parent has not observed the disappointed look in the eyes of his small child, when what was intended by the child as an act of love turned out to be harmful to the parent? What parent would deal harshly at the first offense? Shall the Father of the heavens be less righteous? As we walk humbly in His presence and seek a greater knowledge of His will for us, one thing after another will be brought to light in our conduct that needs improvement, or perhaps things will be brought to light that we need to make right with our fellowmen and acknowledge before God. To persevere in the faith unto the end is to maintain "an honest and good heart," earnestly seeking victory over all sin, confessing our failures to our heavenly Father and to one another in case of injury, and reaching forth to new spiritual heights and experiences day by day. The awful tragedy of apostasy is a very real thing, so much so that the Apostle Paul became a preacher of pathos and ceased not to warn the Christians "night and day with tears," and felt heavily "the care of all the churches," lest they become careless and make shipwreck of their faith, as Scripture indicates that many had done and as many appear to be doing before our very eyes. Think of those who may go down to perdition to mourn over a tender Savior's love, which they forsook and trampled upon, never to experience such a relationship again but only to remember, remember, remember! "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." The righteous have the wonderful privilege of walking with their Savior here on earth, of gathering on the Lord's Day and oftener to express their love and devotion, of communing together in the memorial Supper in remembrance of the price of their redemption, and of applying themselves diligently through the gifts and endowments of the Holy Spirit to win souls for the kingdom of God and rescue many from the judgment and everlasting conscious doom that awaits the impenitent. These shall be their crown of rejoicing in the day when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, when all the faithful shall be forever with their Lord in the glory of the presence of the Godhead, where neither tear nor taint of sin shall mar their joy--"Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

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