

Defend the Truth...In Meekness and Fear

by Eric Lyons, M.Min.

The Truth of God's Word is precious (Proverbs 23:23; cf. John 17:17; Psalm 119:142,151). God expects humanity to come to learn it and love it (John 8:31-32; Psalm 119:47,48,113,119,127,165,167). Christians are then expected to defend it and let others know about it (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:4; Acts 26:24-25). The inspired apostle Peter even commanded first-century Christians to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and **always** be ready to give a defense to **everyone** who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15, emp. added). God is serious about His people teaching and defending His Word.

In our proclamation of the Truth, however, we must keep in mind what Peter noted at the end of 1 Peter 3:15—that our defense is to be made "with **meekness and fear**" (emp. added). Christians are to try to be Christ-like at all times, including when we defend the truth. Our teaching is to be characterized "with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15, NASB/RSV). We are to "honor all people" as we "fear God" (1 Peter 2:17). As we "proclaim the praises of Him" who called us "out of darkness into His marvelous light," we must be "clothed with humility" (1 Peter 2:9; 5:5).

Recently a man who identified himself as a Catholic priest wrote an unsolicited letter to Apologetics Press. We had never heard of this gentleman before reading his note. Although, sadly, he is very misled in his adherence to Catholic doctrine (see Pinedo, 2009), consider some of his analysis of a handful of preachers in the church of Christ. [NOTE: He refers to preachers as "elders."]

As a Roman Catholic priest who follows non-Catholic religions with some interest...I have observed a lot of meanness, rudeness, and lack of basic civility among CoC [Church of Christ—EL] elders [preachers—EL], especially recently. How does one explain this? In general (no doubt there are exceptions perhaps many), Christian love seems deficient in the way they seek to promote truth.

In general, they strike me as tending to be suspicious, rash and uncharitable in their judgments about other people's motives, prone to arrogance, and even too eager to call someone a liar, more so than the average pagan in the streets. These comments are based on only my limited experience, to be sure, and sometimes, no doubt, I am guilty of some of the very same sins and character flaws.

I was considering doing some kind of oral interaction with an elder or two about Catholic matters. Now it looks to me like this would be a royal invitation to verbal abuse, misrepresentation, and even character assassination....

Some members of the Lord's church might tend to dismiss this criticism with a wave of the hand, but we believe this gentleman was right in his assessment and denouncement of some who attempt to "defend the truth," yet do so in an unchristlike manner. What's more, we **all** need to be reminded of the necessity and seriousness of "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). We must examine ourselves and ensure that our teachings and defense of the truth are done lovingly and patiently, confidently yet kindly, neither rudely nor arrogantly (1 Corinthians 13).

Keep in mind what the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy shortly before commanding him to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). He described "a servant of the Lord" as one who "must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). May God help us to live according to the Truth as we seek to defend it.

REFERENCE

Pinedo, Moises (2008), *What the Bible says about the Catholic Church* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), [Online], URL: http://apologeticspress.org/pdfs/e-books_pdf/wtbsatcc.pdf.

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