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Godliness in Conflict

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The book of James has the reputation of being the most practical book of the New Testament, but Paul's epistle to Titus surely must be considered in the same light. Titus is only three chapters long, but all three chapters are light on abstraction and heavy on concrete application. Especially in the second chapter, Paul aims these applications at specific groups, but often they apply equally well to all of us.

This is true of Paul's words to Titus himself in Titus 2:7-8. Paul is aware that when Titus travels to Crete, he's going to run into all sorts of opponents of the gospel. If these people can discredit Titus' preaching through criticism of the preacher, that's exactly what they'll do.

As a result, Paul counsels Titus on how to deprive these critics of the personal attacks they love. Today, all Christians need to listen to his advice because there are plenty of people who want to attack us for the same reason. According to Paul, if we want to put these opponents to shame, we must excel in these four areas:

Good Deeds

Christ-haters rejoice whenever they find religious hypocrites. If they can prove that we don't obey the truth we proclaim, they don't have to obey it either. We defeat this attack by living godly, blameless lives. When everybody knows that we practice what we preach, charges of hypocrisy have no force. What's more, our example often proves to be as powerfully influential as our words.

Purity of Doctrine

It's easy to dismiss somebody who doesn't know why he believes what he believes. Christians claim to be the people of the Book;

if five minutes of religious conversation with us reveals that the Bible is unknown territory to us, that makes us another kind of religious hypocrite. If we clearly don't study the Scriptures, why should anyone else? By contrast, when the time we have spent with the Bible is evident in the way we talk about it, we show that we deserve to be taken seriously.

Dignity

Sad to say, dignity is out of fashion these days. Politicians, celebrities, and talking heads behave deplorably far too often, and far too many Christians take their cue from them, especially on social media. They gleefully share demeaning memes, sneer at anyone who disagrees with them, and engage in endless slanging matches with their opponents. Anyone with a good and honest heart will be repelled by such behavior. On the other hand, when we refuse to engage in it, we will stand out, and God-seekers will be drawn to us.

Soundness of Speech

This is the opposite of the unwholesome speech of Ephesians 4:29: speech that undermines, speech that tears down, speech that leaves its hearers worse off than they were. When we see a patron dress down a fast-food worker for getting their order wrong, that's unwholesome speech on display. We, however, should use our words to make days brighter, lives better, and lead others toward Christ. Just like we would only use sound timbers to build a house, we should only use sound words to build God's temple.

Obviously, conduct like this guarantees nothing. If people could reject Jesus despite His sinless perfection, we cannot expect to overcome a hard heart no matter how we behave. However, when our behavior leaves others with nothing to object to, we make it as likely as possible that they will listen to us.

"My Heart's Desire"

- by Jim Mickells

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:1-3).

There can be no doubt about the love Paul had for his Jewish brethren. These verses clearly indicate the great desire the apostle had for Israel to be saved by the grace of God. Though he was often persecuted by them, even left for dead on occasion, yet he still tried time and again to teach them the gospel of Christ. When traveling from city to city preaching the unsearchable riches of our Lord, he often went into the Jewish synagogues first. Within the confines of these buildings, he tried his best to point the Jews to the Messiah which was spoken of in the Old Testament. Yet most refused to listen to this man of God. Not because of a lack of effort on his part nor because he didn't care for them, but because of their desire to have their own way.

We need the same yearning which Paul had, a willingness on our part to share God's message with our fellow man. It takes time and effort to go out into the fields and sow the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of men and women. We face the same situation the apostle did, not everyone will listen, and most will not accept the truth. Yet the thing lacking among so many followers of Christ it seems, is the love for the souls of our fellow man. May God help each of us to lift our eyes and see the fields that are white to harvest and may our heart's desire be to teach the gospel to the lost so they can be saved.

How tragic it was because they had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. Zeal is a wonderful attribute each Christian should possess. When Paul wrote to Titus, he said, "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). This same apostle commends the church at Corinth for their zeal and how their enthusiasm stirred others to act as well. "For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority" (2 Corinthians 9:2).

Yet zeal must be connected with knowledge if it is to produce the desired results. Knowing God's will is essential if one is to be saved. Jesus said: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me" (John 6:44-45).

The problem with the Jews in Romans 10 was they were ignorant of God's way of making man righteous. Through their ignorance (not knowing), they sought to establish their own system of righteousness and they failed to submit to God (Romans 10:3). God has a plan; it has been revealed in the Scriptures and man must obey it if he is to be saved. No amount of zeal will replace knowing and doing the Lord's will (Matthew 7:21-27).

Many in the religious realm today have a burning zeal for the Lord, yet they lack the knowledge of God's will just like these Jews did. Those of us who are Christians know what the Scriptures teach, but do we have the desire and zeal that is necessary to bring the lost to Christ? God expects us to possess both knowledge, and zeal. One without the other is not pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

May we busy ourselves with the work God has given us to do. "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Someone loved us enough to share the good news of what Christ did for us on the cross so we could be redeemed. Why not pay such an effort forward so others can have the same opportunity for redemption?