

HOW TO EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AS A SLAVE OF JESUS CHRIST? JUDE 3-4

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I. How Should We Then Live?

- A. Be sensitive to the needs of others to the extent that you are willing to change your plans in order to best meet their needs.
- B. Realize the awesome privilege & responsibility in being entrusted with God's instruction.
- C. People are not what they always appear to be.
- D. People act upon what they believe. Immorality follows false teaching (whether it is obvious or not).
- E. Actively contend for doctrinal truth like an athlete competes in an Olympic Game. It is insufficient to only resist false teaching. We must learn how to proactively refute it. Regardless of our position as church members, we need to learn *how* to earnestly contend for the Christian faith.

II. What does a contender of the Christian faith look like?

The idea “*to contend earnestly for*” (*epagonizesthai*) [an expressive compound infinitive which appears only here in the New Testament] comes from the simple form of the verb (*agonizomai*), which appears as “agonize” in its English form, was commonly used in connection with the Greek stadium to denote a strenuous struggle to overcome an opponent, as in a wrestling match. It was also used more generally of any conflict, contest, debate, or lawsuit. Involved is the thought of the expenditure of all one's energy in order to prevail.¹ Therefore, I will be using the analogy of the characteristics of an athlete to communicate what is involved in contending for the Christian faith.

- A. ***A poor athlete is...***
 - 1. Ignorant.
 - 2. Indifferent.
 - 3. Commits himself/herself to the unimportant.
 - 4. Pursues the marginal, the fanciful, or the elusive.
 - 5. Unstable.
 - 6. Exhausted.

¹D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Exposition of Jude 3-4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):144

7. Possesses a “retired mindset.”
8. Lacks an enduring passion.
9. Infatuated with something/someone else.
10. One whose purpose is to fan his or her ego (self-promotion is their endgame).
11. Always question instruction, commands, and authority with unhealthy cynicism.
12. Confuses the virtue of humility with competency.
13. Creates false dichotomies (between head-knowledge vs. heart-knowledge).
14. Too fearful.
15. Fearful of rejection.
16. Relishing in sin.
17. One doesn’t want to face their real issues; they mask their own issues with other priorities.
18. One who believes that earnestly contending is no longer relevant to our contemporary setting.
19. A quitter (too easily gives up when faced with an obstacle).
20. Too committed to everything else (does not spend enough time learning & practicing).
21. Immobilized by doubt (whether intellectual, emotional, or volitional).

B. ***A good athlete...***

1. Realizes that the human problem is sinfulness.
2. Expects a sinner to insist on his or her own view of things.
3. Is fully aware that sin always involves an evasion of the truth.
4. Realizes that sin has ultimately contributed to intellectual confusion.
5. Does not ask whether people have assumptions and beliefs, but whether those positions & beliefs are biblical and systematic.
6. Possesses an enduring passion to know, practice, & defend the truth for the good athlete for he draws his or her strength from an intimate walk with the Lord Jesus Christ (by means of the Holy Spirit) with the goal to glorify God in all things (Phil. 1:19-26). In other words, a contender contends for the truth in the Truth

(Phil.4:10-13).

7. Is one whose integrity is clear before the Lord & cultivates humility-for his/her goal is to glorify God. Integrity before God undergirds theology & theology informs integrity. Therefore, the good athlete consistently lives out what he or she believes.
8. Recognizes the sobering responsibility & privilege of being entrusted with doctrinal truth. It is a sacred & awesome responsibility that must be handed down to the next generation with the utmost care, diligence, & protection.
9. Takes the initiative and examines every truth claim for the athlete possesses and cultivates an enduring passion for welfare of the Christian orthodoxy and the lives of others.
10. Cultivates a disposition of Christian virtue knowing that any resultant fruit belongs to God (Gal 5:22-23).

III. How to Test Theological claims:

Examine the credibility of theological claims by asking the following questions...

- A. Is this theological claim based upon accurate exegesis, sound logic (e.g., *Law of Non-Contradiction*), & truly identifies things as they actually are?

The law of non-contradiction means that two opposite claims cannot both be true at the same time & in the same sense. X cannot be non-X. All logic depends on this simple principle. Rational thought and meaningful discourse demand it. To deny it is to deny all truth in one fell swoop.

- B. Does the theological claim possess a high degree of coherence, i.e., internal consistency with what we already know to be true? To what extent does this truth claim harmonize with other doctrines of the Christian faith?
- C. Does the truth claim possess *explanatory power*? A truth claim will possess explanatory power if it is able to *justify* its claims with *facts* (not opinions; feelings).
- D. Does the truth claim have more than one line of evidence? Orthodoxy is not built upon marginal issues, indirect evidence, or inferences (whether intellectual or emotional).
- E. Does the truth claim harmonize with church orthodoxy (e.g., orthodox creeds of the church)? In other words, what does church history have to say about it?
- F. Is the truth claim actually livable?

IV. Conclusion:

- A. In conclusion I want to close with a warning: As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as members of a local church we have to ever so realize that our objectives can be easily lost. All too often objectives slowly erode; rarely do they suddenly explode. To illustrate how this can happen, listen to the following true story by Charles Paul Conn in his book, *Making it Happen*:

When I lived in Atlanta, several years ago, I noticed in the Yellow Pages, in the listing of restaurants, an entry for a place called Church of God Grill. The peculiar name aroused my curiosity and I dialed the number. A man answered with a cheery, "Hello! Church of God Grill!" I asked how his restaurant had been given such an unusual name, and he told me:

"Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. Well, people, liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After a while we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving the chicken dinners. We kept the name that we started with, Church of God Grill."

- B. Let's not lose what has been handed down to us by Jesus Christ and the Apostles.