

Contend for the Faith

4 July 2019



‘They have committed the supreme suicide who have yielded to the spirit of the times.’
– G K Chesterton

Coming into relationship with Jesus is the greatest thing you will ever experience. To know that Jesus died for you and that your sins are forgiven, to know the thrill of God speaking to you and the Holy Spirit using you, and to have the hope of eternal life is, as Peter says, joy inexpressible and filled with glory! (1 Peter 1:8)

Faithful, For Better Or Worse

But, while Jesus will never disappoint us, life with Jesus continues to have its share of ups and downs. Just as in marriage, we agree to stay together for better or worse, so with Jesus, if we only stick with Him when the going is easy, we don’t really understand what it means to follow Him. Jesus said, *‘Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world’* (John 16:33 NLT). He said, *‘What blessings await you when people hate you and exclude you and mock you and curse you as evil because you follow the Son of Man’* (Luke 6:22 NLT). Jesus also said, *‘If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first’* (John 15:18 NLT).

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None of these verses make good fridge magnets! But this is what we can expect if we truly follow Jesus. When faced with this truth, some might decide to give up. But to those who stay, and overcome, God has given precious promises. *‘To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life’* (Revelation 2:7). *‘To the one who is victorious and continues in My work until the end, I will give authority over the nations’* (Revelation 2:26). *‘The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne’* (Revelation 3:21). *‘The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life’* (Revelation 3:5).

What Trials?

Like Jesus, we can consider the joy ahead of us while going through what's in front of us. But perhaps you say, 'Trials? What trials?'. What are these trials that we, as followers of Jesus, need to conquer?

Silencing the Gospel

While Christians in the West may not endure violence against them as we see in some countries, society today is increasingly trying to muzzle the truth of the gospel. Today in the UK, a Christian doctor risks losing his medical license after creating an opportunity for prayer during a consultation. A teacher lost her job for doing the same. In the US, we have seen bakers repeatedly taken to court for not decorating cakes with slogans that go against their Christian conscience. Another UK doctor lost his job last year. He was deemed 'unfit to work' after he said he believed that gender is defined by biology and genetics, and that, 'as a Christian, the Bible teaches us that God made humans male or female.'

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Pressure to Conform

Society has no stomach for any opinion but its own. Social and political pressure are being placed on Christians, to make us conform to the ever-evolving standards held by the world. However, a Christian is called to believe what the Bible teaches. God is the Creator and Law-Giver. Moral law and natural order come from Him alone. *'For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him'.* (Colossians 1:16)

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The truth is that God is the centre, but society has placed man in the middle and no longer acknowledges the natural laws laid down by the divine Law-Giver. Jude, the brother of Jesus, wrote to the church, *'I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints'* (Jude 1:14). The faith we have been given was given once, for all. The Gospel does not change, just as God does not change. What God hates He has always hated. What God loves He has always loved. His acceptance of us is not an indication of a change in Him, but a change in us, wrought by His Son, Jesus. Only by His blood, can we or anyone we know be accepted by God.

Our Response

So, when society pushes us to change what we believe, we push back. Contend for the faith. Speak aloud the things you believe. Speak about the grace of God, but also speak about His wrath. Speak about the love of God, but also speak about what He hates. If God was as chilled as some people paint Him, Jesus would not have needed to die. It is only because sin is real and the wages of sin are death that Christ was crucified. We should never set out to offend our colleagues, classmates or family members, and don't add to their offence by using disrespectful language or presenting the gospel with your finger wagging. But we must remember, *'..the word of the cross is folly to those*

who are perishing' (1 Corinthians 1:18). As Paul said, 'I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant'. (Galatians 1:10 NLT)

'They are going to make fun of you for being a Christian, so at least deserve it!'

Attending school in the UK during the 90s, I remember our youth pastor telling us, 'They are going to make fun of you for being a Christian, so at least deserve it!' That was good advice then and it is good advice now. The early church prayed that God would enable them to speak His Word with boldness, and so should we. *'Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching' (2 Timothy 4:2). 'Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person' (Colossians 4:6). And, '..if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name' (1 Peter 4:16 NIV).*