

Don't Argue

By S. L. Brengle

"The servant of the Lord must not strive (II Timothy 2:24)

In writing to young Timothy, the aged apostle poured out his heart to one he loved as a son in the gospel. He sought to fully instruct him in the truth, so that on the one hand Timothy might escape all the snares of the devil, and walk in holy triumph and fellowship with God, and thus save himself, and on the other hand, be "thoroughly furnished" to instruct and train other men, and to save them. Among other earnest words, these have deeply impressed me: "Of these things put them in remembrance . . . that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers."

I take it that Paul means by this that, instead of arguing with people, and so losing time, and maybe temper, we are to go right for their hearts, and do our best to win them for Christ, and get them converted and sanctified.

Again he says: "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose" (II Tim. 2: 23-25).

Plainly the apostle thought this advice important, for he repeats it in writing to Titus: "Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain."

I am certain that Paul is right in this. It takes fire to kindle fire, and it takes love to kindle love. Cold logic will not make a man love Jesus, and it is only he that loveth that "is born of God."

We who have had the gospel taught us in such simplicity and purity can scarcely realize the awful darkness through which some men have had to struggle, even in so-called Christian countries, to find the true light.

Some hundred years ago, among the luxurious and licentious nobility of France, and in the midst of the idolatrous forms and ceremonies of the Catholic Church, the Marquis de Renty attained a purity of faith, and a simplicity of life and character, and a cloudless communion with God that greatly adorned the gospel, and proved a blessing not only to the people of his own community and age, but to many people of succeeding generations. His social position, his wealth, and his great business ability led to his being associated with others in various enterprises of a secular and religious character, in all of which his faith and godly sincerity shone with remarkable luster.

In reading his life a few years ago, I was struck with his great humility, his sympathy for the poor and ignorant, and his zealous self-denying efforts to instruct and save them, his diligence and fervor in prayer and praise, and his constant hungering and thirsting after all the fullness of God. But what impressed me as much or more than all the rest was the way he avoided all argument of any nature, for fear he should grieve the Holy Spirit, and quench the light in his soul. Whenever matters of a business or religious nature were being discussed, he carefully thought the subject over, and then expressed his views and the reasons upon which he based them, clearly, fully, and quietly, after which, however heated the discussion might become, he declined to be drawn into any further debate whatever. His quiet, peaceful manner, added to his clear statements, gave great force to his counsels. But whether his views were accepted or rejected, he always went to his opponents afterward and told them that in expressing sentiments contrary to their own he acted with no intention of opposing them personally, but simply that of declaring what seemed to him to be the truth.

In this he seems to me to have closely patterned after the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and his example has encouraged me to follow a like course, and so "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," when otherwise I would have been led into wranglings and disputes which would have clouded my soul and destroyed my peace, even if the Holy Spirit was not entirely driven from my heart.

The enemies of Jesus were constantly trying to entangle him in his words, and involve him in arguments, but he always turned the subject in such away as to confound his foes and take every argument out of their mouths.

They came to him one day, and asked whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not. Without any discussion whatever he asked for a coin. He then asked whose image was on the coin. "Caesar's," they replied. Then "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's," said Jesus.

Again, they brought to him a woman taken in adultery. His loving heart was touched with compassion for the poor sinner, but instead of arguing with her captors as to whether she should be stoned or not, he simply said. "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7), and the whole crowd of hypocrites were so convicted and baffled by his simplicity that they sneaked out, one by one, till the sinner was left alone with her Saviour.

And so, all through the Gospels, I fail to find Jesus engaged in argument, and his example is of infinite importance to us.

It is natural to the "carnal mind" to resent opposition. But we are to be "spiritually minded." By nature, we are proud of our persons, and vain of our opinions, and are ready to stoutly resist him who sets himself against either us or our principles. Our object at once is to subdue him by force of argument, or force of arms, but by any means to subdue him. We are impatient of contradiction, and are hasty in judging men's motives, and condemning all who do not agree with us. And then we are apt to call our haste and impatience "zeal for the truth," when, in fact, it is often a hotheaded, unkind, and unreasoning zeal for our own way of thinking. Now I am strongly inclined to believe that is one of the last fruits of the carnal mind which grace ever subdues. Indeed, it seems to me an old Canaanite that is often let live when it should be destroyed as mercilessly as Samuel hewed Agag in pieces.

But let us who have become partakers of the divine nature see to it that this root of the carnal nature is utterly destroyed. When men oppose us, let us not argue, nor revile, nor condemn, but lovingly instruct them—not with an air of superior wisdom and holiness, but with meekness, solemnly remembering that "the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient."

I find that often, after having plainly, fully, and calmly stated my views to one who is opposing the truth as I see it, I am strongly tempted to strive for the last word; but also find that God blesses me most when I there commit the matter into his hands, and by so doing I most often win my adversary. I believe this is the way of faith, and the way of meekness. While it may seemingly leave us defeated, we generally, in the end, win our foe. And if we have true meekness we shall rejoice more over having won him to an acknowledgement of the truth than in having won an argument.

Pilgrim Holiness Advocate.

Are you prepared now to give the Holy Spirit a free hand in the work of sanctification in your heart and life?

Dr. Charles Inwood.