

Are you CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH?

There are over 700 different religious groups in America today. Many talk of Jesus, read the Bible but division exists because of different beliefs. People claim we are all one despite the differences in our beliefs and teachings. Did Jesus die to bring about 700 different teachings and beliefs? What did the apostles teach in the first century? What did the first century Christians believe?

I. WHAT IS THE FAITH?

A. It is distinctive and completely different from the Old Testament system.

"And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."

Acts 6:7

1. Notice that "many" priests were separating themselves from Judaism and turning to "the faith."
2. Notice that they were not turning to "a faith" but "...becoming obedient to the faith."
3. "The faith" is something that is obeyed!
4. When the word "the" is placed in front of another word, it makes something exact, not general.

ILLUSTRATION: If one asks for "a" pencil, any pencil will do. If someone asks for "the" pencil, they are wanting a specific pencil!

B. It was the new body of teaching that believers were to continue in

(21) "And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, (22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.' (23) And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they believed."

Acts 14:21-23

1. Continuing in "the faith" meant there would be many tribulations and would lead them to enter what (v.22)?
2. "The faith" was the teaching of the Christians in the first century that would lead them to the eternal kingdom of God.

C. It was the only teaching of the first century Christians.

(5) "And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. (6) And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, (7) who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. (8) But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith."
Acts 13:5-8

1. What did Barnabas and Saul proclaim in the synagogues of the Jews (v.5)?
2. What did Sergius Paulus seek to hear(v.6-7)?
3. What did Elymas try to do (v.8)?
4. What is the word of God equal to (v.8)?
5. Did Barnabas and Saul have only one teaching?
6. Were they both teaching the same thing?

(22) "And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; (23) but only, they kept hearing, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.'
Galatians 1:22-23

7. What was the apostle Paul preaching?

D. It can be fallen away from.

(1) "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, (2) by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, (3) men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth."
I Timothy 4:1-3

1. What does the Spirit know about the future from the time this was written (v.1)?
2. Does "the faith" exclude all other teaching (v.1)?
3. What is the source of false teaching (v.1)?

4. If a person teaches that there are "many faiths," are they lining up with God's word?
5. To go after different teachings, what happens within that person (v.2)?
6. Are they sincere? Are they being honest with the Word of God?
7. Notice the apostle Paul speaks of "falling away" from "the faith" (v.1) and calling it equal to "the truth" (v.3).
8. How does this compare with what God expected from the first century deacons in I Timothy 3:8-9?

E. It can be kept.

(6) "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. (7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; (8) in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."
II Timothy 4:6-8

1. How close to death is the apostle Paul when he wrote this (v.6)?
2. What three things has Paul done (v.7)? (1) (2) (3)
3. Keeping "the faith" assures one of what in the future (v.8)?
4. How is the Lord described in this verse (v.8)?
5. If we keep "the faith," can we trust the Lord to give us a crown of righteousness?
6. Is this crown only for the apostle Paul (v.8)?

II. THE FAITH DESCRIBED IN DIFFERENT TERMS.

A. It is compared to "that form of teaching" which frees one from sins.

(17) "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, (18) and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."
Romans 6:17-18

1. What does "that form" refer to? Many different teachings or one in particular (v.17)?

2. Is one freed from sin upon believing "that form" [the faith] or is there obedience involved before freedom occurs?

B. It is "the standard of sound words."

"Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

II Timothy 1:13

1. Where did Timothy get his teaching?

2. What was he to do with "the standard" of sound words? 3. When there is a standard, does that mean there are many different standards or one?

"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

II Timothy 2:2

4. Was this teaching to be handed down as the standard for the ages to come?

C. It is "the truth."

(3) "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, (4) who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

I Timothy 2:3-4

1. God desires how many to be saved (v.4)?

2. Does "the truth" play any part in salvation (v.4)?

(16) But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, (17) and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, (18) men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some."

II Timothy 2: 16-18

3. What can you expect from people who have gone astray from "the truth?"

(24) "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, (25) with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, (26) and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

II Timothy 2:24-26

4. What should be the trademark of the Lord's bond-servant (v.24)?

5. When God grants one repentance, where will it lead them (v.25)?

6. What is wrong with people when they are astray from "the truth" (v.26)?

7. What is the only way out of captivity to the devil's will (v.25)?

(12) Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. (13) I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, (14) knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. (15) And I will also be diligent that any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind."

II Peter 1:12-15

8. What had these people already been established in (v.12)?

9. How close is Peter to death (v.13-14)?

10. What does Peter expect these people to follow (v.15)?

(16) "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (17) For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased' (18) and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (19) So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. (20) But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, (21) for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

II Peter 2:16-21

11. Read this entire section and note what Peter saw and heard as an eyewitness of Jesus.

12. Did the apostles interpret things according to their own will (v.20-21)?

(1) But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. (2) Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; (3) and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

II Peter 2:1-3

13. What did Peter know would show up among these people (v.1)?

14. How many people will be affected by their teachings (v.2)?
15. What will they do to "the truth" (v.2)?
16. Do people say up-front they are going to try to turn people away from "the truth" and deceive them?
17. Notice Peter says they will "secretly introduce" things.
18. Remember back in I Timothy 4:1-3, that Paul said there would be those who fall away from "the faith" because they pay attention to false teaching.
19. Peter is writing these things down so people can follow "the truth" in order to stay in "the faith."

CONCLUSION:

How concerned are you about "the faith"?

How concerned are you about "the truth"?

Can we ever go wrong if we hold to the teachings of the apostles in the first century?
(Remember, they got their teachings directly from the Lord Jesus Himself!)

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

Ephesians 4:4-6