**Fight the Good Fight of Faith (1)**

*by Harry Osborne*

To say that our culture has been given to an ever-growing pattern of tolerance in moral, doctrinal and ethical areas is an understatement. If any trait became the defining characteristic of our society during the 1980’s and 90's, "tolerance" was the word most often used to describe it. With the actions of President Clinton in the Oval Office and its widespread coverage, a scarlet "A" was emblazoned on our national garb from the White House on down -- and the sad fact is that it became a fashion statement rather than a source of shame. Like Israel of old, we could no longer blush. We were not ashamed. So, we were urged not to fight it, but to passively accept a higher cultural evolution by being "open" and "tolerant" of unspeakable immorality. As the effect of ungodliness and evil continued to work, it grew worse and worse until we now find ourselves in a society mandating acceptance of perversity of every kind including homosexual marriage (2 Tim. 3:13).

When people rose to fight this manifestation of moral depravity, they were denounced as "right-wing bigots," "fanatics," "conservative nuts," "extremists," "watchdogs of morality" and similar epithets designed to demonize the objectors. The very people who could have helped to avert the disaster brought on our society were so vilified that their warnings went unheeded.

But the evidence of a growing tolerance did not stop in the Oval Office, the "Gay Pride" movement, abortion rights rallies, pornography retailer, the increasing filth on television, the alarming sensuality of popular music across the spectrum or the skimpy fashions of the world. The growing tolerance of our society has affected many of our brethren as they have mirrored the world by justifying a renewed plea for "unity-in-diversity" which "tolerates contradictory teaching and practice on important moral and doctrinal questions" (Ed Harrell, Christianity Magazine, series beginning Nov. 1988 ending May 1990; quotation from May 1990, p. 6). With that principle, the salt rapidly started to lose its savor and brethren began to "tolerate" an ever growing number into their on-going and continuous fellowship despite sinful practices and doctrinal errors.

It started with a justification to receive brother Homer Hailey while he taught doctrinal error on divorce and remarriage, but it did not end there. Those who would fight the good fight of faith were accused of "unheroic attacks" (Harrell, *Christianity Magazine*, Nov. 1988). They were widely called "watch-dogs." Faithful brethren were vilified as “a pack of snarling curs (dogs - *HRO*), suspicious and paranoid, biting, snarling and snapping in all directions... a paranoid frenzy of biting and devouring one another” (Paul Earnhart, "Watch Them Dogs," *Christianity Magazine*, July 1996). Such maligning of brethren standing for truth gave the not-so-subtle message that these savage creatures were to be excluded. Consequently, a new form of quarantine was put in place with meetings canceled and communications severed. It seemed the only one our "more tolerant" brethren could not tolerate and fellowship was a brother who boldly proclaimed the truth. When it came time to fight the good fight of faith concerning the Bible doctrine on fellowship, modesty, the use of intoxicating drink, and even the creation account, those who fought for truth were characterized in similar terms by many.

Where has the effect of such tolerance led us? The spring, summer and sporting fashions of many Christians show a vastly increased level of exposure has accompanied this greater "tolerance." A growing number of congregations now receive those in unlawful marriages. We now have "non-institutional" brethren who decry debating against denominationalism and its doctrines in honorable controversy. These brethren claim to walk the way of truth, but they actually travel a far different road. They deny the need to fight the good fight, telling us the fighters are the real problem. One can almost hear the familiar refrain from their lips, "Just preach the gospel and leave everyone else alone." They are more comfortable with rank error than with those who fight against it.

As brethren in previous times came to understand the errors of denominationalism that enslaved the souls of men, they fought it boldly. Many truths we understood now were given clarity in the testing of honorable controversy. Reading debates and polemic writings of brethren in past centuries not only helps readers today to understand the fallacy of error, but to more fully grasp truth. Doing the will of God always demands the use of the sword alongside the tools for construction (cf. Neh. 4:17-18).

The divine mandate for us to fight the good fight of faith could not be clearer. Let us notice a few passages plainly declaring the directive to fight in the spiritual battle for truth and righteousness.

**1 Timothy 6:12**

*Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

The inspired imperative, "Fight the good fight of faith," could not be stated more forcefully. It is firmly connected to the next imperative, "Lay hold on the life eternal." We cannot lay hold on eternal life without fighting the good fight of faith. When we were called in Christ and confessed Him as Lord and Master, we enlisted in His service and took the oath of a soldier in His army. Refusal to fight in defense of the faith now is nothing short of spiritual treason.

**1 Timothy 1:18-20**

*This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme*.

The prophecies of Scripture were to lead Timothy that he might engage in proper warfare. The same is true today. When we by ***faith*** hold to **the faith**, having a good conscience consistent with truth, we are both prepared to fight and vigilant to the need for fighting. Faithful saints taking to heart the direction found from God's truth do not look lightly upon error that leads souls to destruction. They have seen its devastating effects on the lives of those led astray. They recall names and faces of brothers and sisters whose souls have been destroyed by various false doctrines. To them, the effect of false teaching is not merely theoretical -- it is real and it is deadly! They will not stand idly by while the teachers of false doctrine beckon others to be torn asunder on the hidden reef of deadly error. Faithful Christians letting the word abide in and direct their hearts will oppose the errorist and seek to save souls in peril.

**2 Timothy 4:1-8**

I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables. But be thou sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil thy ministry. For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing.

Paul's parting charge to Timothy made the connection between fighting the good fight and receiving the incomparable reward. The apostle's life demonstrated the degree to which that fight encompassed every part of his life and focused him on the single goal of eternal life (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21; 3:13-14). The fight required self-control and self-denial (1 Cor. 9:27). It involved opposition to people of repute (Gal. 2:11-14). It was often contrary to popular will (1 Cor. 4:13). At times, it demanded that he stand alone to face the opposition (2 Tim. 4:16). The fight often left him battered, bruised and bloodied both literally and figuratively from perils of every kind (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Paul yearned for the rest beyond more earnestly because his daily fight for the faith was an agonizing struggle. Could it be that we fail to long for heaven as Paul did because we have not invested the effort to fight as he did? No mere spectator has the intense yearning for peace that is in the very soul of the man who has paid the price of battle. Brethren, the world and its ways have not changed in character since Bible times (1 Jn. 2:15-17). If we find ourselves more tolerant of that world and less militant than Paul was, it should tell us that we have not fought the good fight as he did. If we refuse to fight, we cannot expect to receive the victory crown in reward as Paul did.