

1 TIMOTHY 6:2b-5

A FIGHTING FUNDAMENTALIST

“Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.”¹

The term “fighting fundamentalist” has become a pejorative used to disparage and ridicule naïve literalists who hold the Bible to be the Word of God. Fearful of being called names, evangelicals often shy away from doing anything that would make them appear overly firm in defence of the Faith or even somewhat aggressive in advancing the truth. It is often true that evangelicals want to be acceptable to the elite of the religious world, though they don’t necessarily wish to jettison their faith in the Bible as the Word of God.

Let me state for the record that I am a naïve literalist when it comes to the Word of God. I accept that God said what He meant to say. It is not my job to make His words palatable for modern sensibilities; I am responsible to declare the truth He has given, warning lost people to flee the coming wrath and urging the righteous to stand firm in the Faith. Undoubtedly, that makes me a Fundamentalist in the eyes of many people. However, as with many labels, the term covers a multitude of sins, meaning pretty much whatever one wants it to mean. Nevertheless, if I am to wear the label, I should at least be able to define what I mean.

To be a Fundamentalist should mean that I hold to the Fundamentals of the Faith. Ideally, the term means that I accept Jesus Christ as very God and very man. It means that I am convinced that He gave His life as a sacrifice for sinful people because of mankind’s inability to rescue themselves. The term assuredly means that I am convinced that the Son of God conquered death and is risen from the tomb. To be a Fundamentalist means that I know that Christ the Lord has ascended into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. As a Fundamentalist, I am certain that by faith in Him, the Risen Lord of Glory, that anyone is set free from sin and brought into a right standing with God Himself. To be a Fundamentalist means that I believe that Jesus the Son of God is coming again to take His people to Himself. Perhaps most importantly, when I say I am a Fundamentalist, it should mean that I am convinced of these precious truths because the Bible is God’s authoritative and accurate Word. This Book is infallible and inerrant, and it is the basis for faith and practise.

To say that I am a fighting Fundamentalist requires further explanation, not because the term is difficult, but because the term has been seriously distorted. I don’t go looking for a fight; but I am in a fight. I am a man of peace, seeking peace with all people. However, because I stand firm in this most Holy Faith, I know that the truths I hold will prove offensive to those who are opposed to the Master. Tragically, church members who want the comfort of the pew without the cost of the cross will whimper, whinge and whine that I am attacking them when I declare biblical truth. Outsiders who know the truth, but who are unwilling to embrace truth, will attack me as if such an attack will free them from the conflict of their own conscience.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Though not seeking the opprobrium associated with the term, I became a Fundamentalist. Without seeking conflict, I became a Fighting Fundamentalist through standing firm. If you have convictions concerning the Christ and concerning His Word you will soon be known as a Fundamentalist. As one Fundamentalist of a bygone era stated, “If you want no trouble, don’t say anything, don’t do anything, don’t be anything.”

The Master has warned, “A man’s enemies will be the members of his household” [MATTHEW 10:36 NET BIBLE]. The strongest opposition to holding convictions often comes from fellow believers. I worked closely with the wife of a denominational leader on one occasion. On a civic board which I chaired were three Christians, each an individual of stature within their denomination and within their respective churches. This woman was one of those believers. Opposing action which I found to be morally doubtful that was proposed by the board, I framed my opposition by stating that I held Fundamentalist views. Peggy remonstrated with me, “Oh, Mike, don’t say that; it is so offensive. Don’t let anyone know you are a Fundamentalist.”

Her view was that the world would be amenable to almost any action so long as believers were prepared to make concessions morally and ethically so that we could work in concert with those perishing together with this dying age. Her position did not differ significantly from that of numerous denominational leaders I have known over the years. One such leader informed me, “You could pastor any of our largest churches if you would only be more reasonable in your sermons. If you were not so combative, people would flock to hear you.” This is precisely the Pharisees’ complaint about Jesus. That is the same thing the Judaizers said to the Apostle Paul. May God deliver us from such compromise.

I do not urge you to be pugnacious; but I plead with you to know what you believe and to know why you believe. I urge you as Christians to stand firm in this Faith. I will encourage you so long as God gives me opportunity to turn from the easy path in order to embrace the rigour of this manly Faith. I insist that God seeks courageous men and women who will not yield in matters vital to eternal salvation.

IMPERATIVES FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY — “Teach and urge these things.” What things? All that has preceded the missive to this point! Let’s review so we are all on the same footing. Summarising all that Paul has said to this point leads to the conclusion that he is focused on oversight of the congregation. The Apostle’s primary concern has been insinuation of false teachers into the life of the congregation. In fact, it was his concern for their infiltration into the community of faith that was his initial focus in this missive.

“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

“Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted” [1 TIMOTHY 1:3-11].

The instructions Paul delivers continue in paths that should be seen as eminently practical. Lead the congregation to be a praying church. Follow sound order, appointing only those qualified to lead as elders. Seek out gifted men and women to provide service as deacons and within the Order of Widows. Know that you will never be in the majority in society, for society will become progressively corrupt as the end of the age nears. Be godly in your own walk before the Master. Seek peace with all people. “Teach and urge these things!”

What is obvious from Paul’s instructions is not only that the elder is to act responsibly in doing the various things named, but he is to “teach and urge these things!” The elder is to teach and he is to urge listeners to honour God through adopting these various acts. Paul stresses the act of preaching throughout the two letters to Timothy. Follow his train of thought.

As mentioned moments ago, Paul opens the letter by reminding Timothy that he must charge people “not to teach any different doctrine” [1 TIMOTHY 1:3]. The Apostle says the overseer must be “able to teach” [1 TIMOTHY 3:2; 2 TIMOTHY 2:24]. Beyond this basic requirement for eldership, the elder is charged with the responsibility of seeking out faithful men in order to teach the truths that Paul has provided through this letter [2 TIMOTHY 2:2]. Underscore in your mind that the means by which an elder equips disciples is through the ministry of teaching.

This brings me to consideration of the act of preaching in this day. Contemporary preaching appears to be based on several models that are at best secondary in the Word of God. Seminaries and Bible Colleges train pastors to function as administrators; and the expectation of church boards is that they are hiring administrators rather than preachers. The board acts as sort of a corporate board and the pastor is viewed as an ecclesiastical CEO who is hired to fulfil the expectations of the business-minded board—he serves at the pleasure of the board.

Again, preachers are trained to be counsellors. There seems at times to be incredible effort to create pulpit psychologists to help people deal with their problems coping with life. If I heed the emphasis of modern pastoral training, we pastors are responsible to equip people to live a trouble-free life now—parishioners are to be comforted and comfortable with life now. The philosophy of modern church goers appears to be “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” [ISAIAH 22:13b]. Contemporary church attendees are accurately described by Isaiah,

“‘Come,’ they say, ‘let me get wine;
let us fill ourselves with strong drink;
and tomorrow will be like this day,
great beyond measure.’”

[ISAIAH 56:12]

I do not wish to disparage the work of administering congregational activities or of providing wise counsel for people who are struggling to know how to respond righteously to life’s challenges. Nevertheless, the first priority of the man of God is to “preach the Word!” Pastors must always remember the apostolic admonition that is given to the man of God in the last days. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” [2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5].

Take note that Paul issues multiple imperatives incumbent upon the man of God. ***Preach!*** First and foremost, the man of God is to be a herald—a preacher proclaiming the Word of God. ***Be ready!*** He is to practise situational awareness. The concept is to understand the times and the environment in which one finds himself, responding to the changing conditions. ***Reprove! Rebuke! Exhort!*** The man of God is to point out errors, warn those who hear him, encouraging listeners to do right. There is no hint of the modern concepts of affirming the rebellious in their wicked walk, of making people feel good about their reluctance to do right or of enabling the wayward to continue walking contrary to the will of God.

Moreover, the man of God is not to seek some easy way of fulfilling his ministry; he is to be manly, vigorous in pursuit of the will of God. There follows a flurry of commands demanding that the elder labour in the work which the Master has assigned. ***Be sober-minded! Endure suffering! Evangelise! Fulfil your ministry!*** In the face of unrelenting demand for ease and comfort, the man of God must be self-controlled. He must be prepared to face hardship, standing firm on the Word of God. He must love the souls of lost people, constantly seeking opportunity to warn them to flee the coming wrath and to turn to the freedom that is found in Christ the Lord. Thus, he will fulfil his service before the Lord and to the people of God.

These commands must be heeded despite knowing the opposition he will face. Note that the Apostle warned elders, “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3,4]. I suggest that the day of which the Apostle warned is upon us. Church members do not want to listen to truth; they are eager to find teachers who will please them by saying what they want to hear. Shall the man of God see himself as hired to do a job; or shall he see himself as appointed to fulfil a divine service? If it is the latter, then he must know that he will be labelled as a fighting fundamentalist who is unwilling to compromise for the sake of harmony.

I recall an incident that occurred when I had been invited to speak at a large church on one occasion. Thousands attended that congregation each Sunday morning. I spoke from the passage Paul wrote of his personal commitment to the Faith. “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” [PHILIPPIANS 3:7-10].

I poured out my heart, urging those listening to choose the rigorous life that accompanies following hard after the Master. At the conclusion of the message, the gentleman who had invited me to speak took me aside to speak with me. His words were meant to be sage counsel, though I found them to be deeply disturbing. “Mike,” my erstwhile friend informed me, “what you said was true. We need to hear those words. However, you will never be invited back.”

At that moment, I felt a little like John Wesley must have felt. Reading his diary, one reads something along these lines, “Preached today at St. Sobriety. Was told never to return. Preached today at St. Sophistry. Was chased from the sanctuary. Preached on a tombstone in the cemetery of St. Sneezedust. Was mocked, pelted with rotted vegetables and assailed with assorted missiles.” I take comfort in the fact that I have never sought to affirm the comfortable nor assail the afflicted. Rather, I have set before me the goal of saying together with the Apostle, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” [2 TIMOTHY 4:7].

My prayer is that I may be able to say at the end of days, “I have fought the good fight,” rather than saying, “Well, I didn’t make many mistakes.” The race is not about personal comfort, but about strenuously reaching beyond my comfort level. May God give grace to compete vigorously rather than merely being present.

THE MOTIVE OF OPPOSITION — “If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.”

If the elder exposes the character of those who set themselves in opposition to the Gospel, he is said to be combative. He is not irenic in the estimate of those who imagine they are spiritually superior because they never have any conflict. He is a trouble maker, a disturber of the peace. We have forgotten that the Apostles held the view that peace at any price was too high of a price. Do you recall the conflict when Paul and Silas travelled to Thessalonica?

“When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus’” [ACTS 17:1-7].

Did you hear that charge? “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” Regardless of how you translate it, the Bible is saying here, these men have made an impact for Jesus Christ everywhere they go and now they are in our city. Would you like that to be said of you? “To turn the world upside down” was a euphemism for stirring up trouble. Preaching became known as an act that would stir up trouble. Standing for the Faith of Christ the Lord was said to turn the world upside down.

The history of the New World presents the record of numerous instances of persecution because preachers dared preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Three Baptist preachers were arrested in Boston and imprisoned for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Dr. John Clarke was ordered to pay a fine of twenty pounds for preaching without warrant. John Crandall, an elder in the church was ordered to pay a fine of five pounds for the same crime. Obadiah Holmes was incarcerated for three months before being fined thirty dollars. After this, he was stripped of his clothing and publicly whipped with thirty strokes with a three-corded whip. Elder Holmes was whipped so viciously that for weeks he was able to lie down only by resting on his knees and elbows. It was reported that the beating was so savage that blood flowed down his back and legs and filled his boots.²

² William Cathcart, ed., “**The Baptist Encyclopædia** (Louis H. Everts, Philadelphia, PA 1881) 538-9

Let me provide another incident from the historical record. In Spotsylvania County, Virginia, three Baptists were haled into court. John Walker, Lewis Craig and James Childs were indicted for “preaching the Gospel of the Son of God.” The case was brought to trial on June 4, 1768. A gentleman well known to the court was present that day, having ridden sixty miles from his home in Hanover County to volunteer his services in defence of these men.

As Patrick Henry entered the courtroom, the clerk was reading the indictment. He pronounced the crime with emphasis, “for preaching the Gospel of the Son of God.” The prosecuting attorney pronounced a few words, assuming that conviction and sentence would be perfunctory. Having received the indictment and standing to address the court, Patrick Henry stated, “May it please your Worships, I think I heard read, as I entered this house, the paper I now hold in my hand. If I have rightly understood, the king’s attorney of this county has framed an indictment for the purpose of arraigning and punishing, by imprisonment, three inoffensive persons, before the bar of this court, for a crime of great magnitude as disturbers of the peace. May it please the court, what did I hear read? Did I hear it distinctly, or was it a mistake of my own? Did I hear an expression, as if a crime, that these men, whom your Worships are about to try for a misdemeanor, are charged with what?”—and continuing in a low, solemn tone—“for preaching the Gospel of the Son of God!”

Another fearful pause, while the speaker alternately cast his sharp, piercing eyes on the court and the prisoners, and resumed: “If I am not deceived, according to the contents of the paper which I now hold in my hand, these men are accused of preaching the Gospel of the Son of God. Great God!”

Henry devastated the jurists’ argument with his scathing restatement of the charge, concluding with a thunderous inquiry, “What law have they violated?” Then, for the third time, in a slow, dignified manner, he lifted his eyes to heaven and waved the indictment around his head. It was one of the few times in those early years when Baptist preachers were discharged. It is reported that the judge, in a tremulous voice, commanded, “Sheriff, discharge these men.”³

Those who teach a different doctrine, not agreeing with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, are puffed up with conceit and understand nothing. Moreover, such a person has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words which produce envy, dissension, slander and evil suspicions. Those opposing the message of grace imagine that godliness is a means to gain.

Standing for truth, standing against error will inevitably elicit the charge that the one who dares so stand will be accused of foul, heinous sedition against the peace. However, the sooner that the man of God settles whom he must please, the sooner he shall prove his calling. If he is to please those who pay his salary, he will always be a kept man, an ecclesiastical whore, meriting nothing more than the contempt of those benighted souls that use him for their own comfort. If he will please Him who appoints to holy service, he must align himself with those despised in this world. He will know the reality of the statement penned by the brother of our Lord, “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” [JAMES 4:4].

Those opposing the truth seek comity with the world; they esteem the approval of the world as more valuable than God’s commendation. These timid souls slink about, congratulating themselves that they are not disturbers like those who stand with the truth, all the while imagining that they are doing the work of God. They deceive themselves and dishonour God.

³ J. W. Porter, **The World’s Debt to the Baptists** (Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1914) 85-89

Paul's description of these men identifies them as unhealthy. While his statement actually claims they have "an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels," it follows that their motives lead them along unhealthy avenues. One must imagine that Jude's description of those who were infiltrating the churches were themselves such unhealthy individuals. Listen to the blistering condemnation Jude pronounced. "Certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" [JUDE 4].

The Brother of our Lord exposes these ecclesiastical cockroaches in caustic terms. "These people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

"It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.' These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage" [JUDE 10-16]. I believe you will agree that their motives appear identical to those listed by Paul. Focused on their own comfort and personal advancement, they care nothing for the work of God regardless of how loudly they protest.

Paul continues by implying that the presence of such individuals attracts people who are "depraved in mind and deprived of the truth" [1 TIMOTHY 6:5b]. The tragedy of this description is that the Apostle is speaking of people who superficially are members of a congregation. These are professing Christians, though their actions belie their professions. When such individuals are exposed from the pulpit as the elder holds up the mirror of the Word, we hear their plaintive bleat, "Can't we all get along?" For them, the absence of exposure equates to God's approval. However, the Lord God Himself charges the wicked, "You thought I was exactly like you" [PSALM 50:21, NET BIBLE].

Ultimately, though they are likely incapable of articulating the matter themselves, these vile creatures who are opposed to truth are guilty of exalting themselves even above the Master. They imagine that they please God through seizing control over His people. Consequently, churches throughout the western world are run as businesses rather than functioning as churches of the Risen Son of God. What is especially tragic is that parishioners are so biblically illiterate that they are not even aware of their peril. They have drunk the Kool Aid and now imagine that so long as they perform some meaningless task—hold a silent vigil, march in some noisy protest or give their money to some approved cause—they are acceptable before the Lord.

Condemning the Judaisers, Paul exposed their motives—motives that are surprisingly similar to those identified in this missive. "These people who are attempting to force the ways of circumcision on you have only one motive: They want an easy way to look good before others, lacking the courage to live by a faith that shares Christ's suffering and death. All their talk about the law is gas. They themselves don't keep the law! And they are highly selective in the laws they do observe. They only want you to be circumcised so they can boast of their success in recruiting you to their side. That is contemptible" [GALATIANS 6:12, 13, THE MESSAGE]!

The same holds true today; those who oppose the preaching the truth are looking for an easy way to look good because they lack the courage to live by the faith that shares Christ's suffering and death. Their motives are corrupt; their actions are abominable; they themselves are contemptible. They will all be exposed as corrupt at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The grave failure of their lives is that they are not crucified to the world. Paul testified to the Galatians, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" [**GALATIANS 6:14**].

THE CHARACTER OF OPPOSITION — "If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain."

According to Paul's words, those opposed to truth are characterised by "envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction." The despicable character flaws that Paul has listed should never be witnessed among Christians; unfortunately, such characteristics are witnessed far too frequently among those naming the Name of Christ. I am not saying those exhibiting such traits are Christian; I am only saying that they claim to be Christians.

This dark catalogue of sinful behaviour is found frequently in Paul's writings. For instance, when he castigates those who have excluded God from their thinking, exalting themselves, he lists some of these same awful behaviours. After speaking of the dreadful depths to which a culture sinks when it has excluded God, he makes this statement. "Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" [**ROMANS 1:28-32**]. Whereas in Romans, the Apostle was reviewing society, in our text he is cataloging the sinful behaviour of professing Christians!

Again, think of the "works of the flesh," which the Apostle says are "evident." "The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these." Then, Paul issues this stern warning, "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" [**GALATIANS 5:19-21**].

Paul speaks of similar sinful behaviour as unbecoming in his Letter to Ephesian saints. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" [**EPHESIANS 4:31**]. That portion of the Word anticipates what was written to the Colossian Christians. "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" [**COLOSSIANS 3:5-10**].

Writing Titus, Paul reminded the young preacher of the life believers once lived, contrasting that to the life they should now live. “Remind [believers] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” [TITUS 3:1-11].

Clearly, envy is condemned throughout Scripture. No man is commended because of jealousy, because of envy. Each saint is responsible before God to confess the sin of envy, ridding herself of all such wickedness. Strife, or quarreling, is detestable among all believers. We are to seek peace, to endeavour to live in harmony, not quarreling with fellow believers. Control over our own life lies within our own choices; no believer need quarrel and squabble with other believers over any issue. Slander is the language of the evil one; it should never mark the speech of the child of God. “Evil suspicions” translates a single word in the original language—it is a hapax legomenon. The word speaks of having an opinion based on scant evidence. It implies that the individual is prepared to hold a false opinion as though it was true.⁴ The Greek word translated “constant friction” is likewise a hapax legomenon, occurring only here in the New Testament. It speaks of continuous and repeated arguing. Clearly, the Apostle’s characterisation of those opposing the truth is not pretty.

Here is what is tragic—such actions are tolerated among many of the saints of God! Perhaps the people are untaught, and thus they don’t know better. Assuredly, we preachers could and should do a better job teaching the Word and warning against sinful behaviour. I suspect, however, that such behaviour is tolerated in great measure because elders are unwilling to confront sinful people! They view their position as a job, and they don’t want to rock the boat. For far too many preachers of the Word, a regular paycheque is more important than is holding parishioners to the truth of the Word!

Another reason such behaviour is tolerated among the professed people of God undoubtedly is because we have grown accustomed to the dim light of living by half-truths. Perhaps a given behaviour is bothersome, but we accept it because we convince ourselves that “old Frank” means well, or because “old Elsie” really has the good of the church at heart. Let me say very plainly that sinful behaviour is never becoming to a professed believer; and when such wicked behaviour is tolerated within a church, regardless of how familiar those acting in such fashion may be, it is a disgrace. Christ is dishonoured, the saints are disgraced and the lost are turned away from the truth. A primary reason for this negative impact is that such people are “depraved in mind and deprived of the truth.”

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 369

How one lives grows out of that one's thinking. If life is described by wickedness, the life of that individual can be nothing other than wicked. It matters not how religious one may be, if their mind is depraved and if they are deprived of the truth, they cannot be holy. Consequently, far too many of the religious societies bearing the Name of Christ must be seen for what they are—unholy, filthy and devoid of light!

Let me issue a serious warning: ***we become what we follow***. If we follow Christ, we will become progressively Christ-like in the way in which we live. Paul would call the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:1**]. I say the same thing to you today, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Do not imitate my life beyond that example we have of Christ the Lord. However, as I follow the Master, so walk as I do.

Know, however, that a depraved or unregenerate mind cannot function normally in the spiritual realm. Such a mind cannot react normally to the truth. Paul warns, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God" [**ROMANS 8:7a**]. You will become like those whom you follow. If those who lead you have depraved minds, you cannot please God. Paul will continue by warning, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" [**ROMANS 8:8**]. Just so, if those whom you follow are in the flesh, you yourself will begin to walk in the flesh, and you cannot please God regardless of how hard you try. Regardless of how many prayers you say, regardless of how frequently you participate in the ordinances of the church, regardless of how many chapters of the Bible you read, regardless of how often you endure a sermon—if you are in the flesh, you cannot please God.

Know that if you "teach and urge these things," you will be called a Fundamentalist. Know that if you stand firm in these truths, you will be called a Fighting Fundamentalist. Because you are a Christian, you must not yield to the temptation to become pugnacious, obstreperous, combative; you must endeavour to reveal the Spirit of Christ. In his Second Letter, the Apostle will instruct the Elder of the Congregation in Ephesus, "Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" [**2 TIMOTHY 2:23-26**].

Now, I have spoken plainly, and some will perhaps dissent from what has been said. Is this dissent because they have a mind that is hostile to God? If you resist the truth, is it because you have a depraved heart? That need not be, for God has provided life in His Son; and that life is offered to you even now. The Word of God promises, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" Paul concludes with this promise, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

May God grant you repentance that results in life. May this be done to the praise of His glory. May it be even this day. Amen.