Articles by Arnold Reynolds

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Fighting Words (Aug 1959)

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

Shall we use a musical instrument in the Sunday School? Are visual aids permissible? What kind of Sunday School paper shall be procured?

In answering such questions, the Sunday School teacher is expressly forbidden to strive — for he is a servant of the Lord!

The expression, "the Church Militant", has been widely used for a long time, and hymns with a theme like that of "Fight the Good Fight" have always been popular. Apparently the idea of "standing up for our convictions" appeals to us, and not a few may even think that they have as much right to the title, "Defender of the Faith", as does the British Sovereign.

We need to remember, however, that just because we are inclined to do something does not mean that it is right: we are warned that in our flesh dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and that the carnal mind — our natural outlook — is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7).

Rather than follow other Christians even, we must remember that Christ has left us the perfect example and we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). He said of Himself, "He shall not strive" (Matt. 12:19).

Furthermore, He gave these instructions to His followers: “I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain” (Matt. 5:39-41).

Strife Over Words

Paul wrote to Timothy: “Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers” (2 Tim. 2:14).

Many Christians strive over words today. Of course, there is generally a right and a wrong way to express it correctly. Nevertheless, words are only the vehicles of thoughts, and there are many Christians whose thoughts may be right although their words may be inaccurate. Then why argue and strive over the mere words? Can we not fellowship with them over the wonderful things of Christ even if they may express them in a different way?

The seriousness of the matter may be judged from Paul’s words, “Charging them before the Lord”. And notice too, the results of such strife: the hearers are subverted, overthrown, ruined. “Destroy not him… for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:15).

Striving About the Law

Paul mentions another common cause of strife in Titus 3:9, “Avoid strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain”. This could be taken to apply to strife over interpretations of Scripture. How many sad

examples there are of this kind of contention in the history of the Church, and how unprofitable and vain they have proven to be. There are still many equally sad examples of the same thing in the Church today. When there are so many points about which Christians can agree, why search out the few about which we disagree?

Strife from Hatred

“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins” (Prov. 10:12). As the word “hatred” is used in the Authorized Version, it can mean anything from a dislike to a loathing. So in this sense, most of us must admit that there are some, if not several, fellow Christians whom we “hate”.

When we have a dislike for someone, we often cannot avoid stirring up strife with him. This is certainly the cause of many quarrels amongst Christians — even amongst Sunday School teachers!

On the other hand, when we really love a person, we cannot readily attribute their wrong actions to wrong motives. Since a dislike for others is the cause of so much strife, in loyalty to Christ we simply cannot allow ourselves the carnal luxury of hating — or even disliking — other Christians.

The next time we are tempted to dislike another Christian, let us remember: (1) that he is one for whom the Lord Jesus died; (2) that he is one whom the Lord Jesus especially chose and called to be His own, and that some day he will be transformed to the very image of Christ; (3) that if there is some “hangover” of his carnal nature that does not appeal to us, neither does there dwell in our flesh any good thing. “Do nothing from

selfishness or conceit but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4. RSV). If you feel that you cannot really consider another Christian to be better than yourself, then do not criticize him — it is you who have failed!

Strife from Pride

A fourth cause of strife is mentioned in Proverbs 13:10, "Only by pride cometh contention". This cause is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the preceding one, for pride is, in essence, self-esteem. Nevertheless, pride is a crucial cause of strife amongst Christians for most contentions are sharpest between those who are conscious of using their abilities. We sometimes feel that we could have done a better job of leading the singing or teaching that difficult class. Pride can be the forerunner of hatred, but in any case it is poison in the heart and dynamite in the Church. It is far too dangerous to have around.

Treatment of Strife

In view of these various causes of strife, what must be done about it? First, observe the definite command in 2 Timothy 2:24, "The servant of the Lord (including the Sunday School teacher!) must not strive, but be gentle unto all men". Therefore, if we engage in strife, we are clearly disobedient to our Lord and Master. If we will but recognize strife as sin and confess it as such, God will certainly forgive us and provide the grace to overcome this sin.

Next, look at Proverbs 20:3, "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife". Naturally, we all want to have the

last word in an argument. But remember that this desire springs from a fallen condemned nature, whereas we are to be partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). God Himself has said that it is an honour for a man to cease from strife; i.e., to be the first one to give in!

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Prov. 26:20). Talebearing is at the root of many contentions and it also keeps many others going. If we will judge our tongues in His presence, God will give grace to curb them, that they may be used to bless God and not to curse men.

A Time to Fight

Conversely, of course, there are conditions in which the Christian is required to fight, for the Apostle Paul was able to say at the close of his life, “I have fought the good fight” (2 Tim. 4:7).

In any contest, it is mandatory to know whom we are fighting. Some Christians fail to identify their real enemy. Utterly confused, they stumble over one another, each supposing the other to be the enemy. And all the time, the Word of God clearly points out our life-long enemy, “Your adversary the devil” (1 Pet. 5:8).

Remember, no child of God, no brother in Christ — no matter how far he may be from your ideal —can ever be your adversary. God has sent him to you as an ally, and if you fight against him, you are only weakening your own cause, which is, of course, the cause of Christ Himself.

“Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal)” (2 Cor. 10:3-4). “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against

powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). This is the negative side of the picture: since we are fighting against spiritual wickedness, we are not to use fleshly weapons (including the tongue!).

On the positive side, some of our weapons are described in Ephesians 6:13-18; others, in 1 Timothy 6:12 —"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." In fighting this good fight, we must be armed with an absolute trust in our Lord Jesus Christ and in all His promises. Satan can have us at his mercy (apart from the Lord's intervention) if he can but shake us loose from an unconditional and unlimited trust in God.

Paul's exhortation to the Philippians is also pertinent to spiritual warfare, "With one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). We can apply this to striving together in the spread of the gospel. What a worthy struggle this is, teacher! One in which the Lord requires your complete devotion.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Rom. 15:30). While the armies of the world move forward on their stomachs, the army of Christ must advance on its knees. The world is a veritable battlefield for the Christian, and Satan will do all he can to prevent us from achieving victory through prayer.

He will also do his utmost to keep us from striving together, for the sake of Christ, the gospel, and one another!

* * *

Before me, just closed doors; why, I know not!
He promised to provide; has He forgot?
I cannot seem to find the proper key;
“Oh, God, why do the doors stay locked to me?”
He speaks so soft and low, “Why don’t you pray?”
And in this question He has shown the way.
No door is closed when men but intercede,
And he who prays is he who shall be freed.