

Militancy—an Essential Aspect of Gospel Ministry

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“Contending for the faith,” or *militancy*, involves being aggressive and combative about the Christian faith. Many Christians think this is unessential or the manifestation of a domineering, caustic spirit. Despite this, the Scripture demonstrates that the condemnation of corruption and confusion *is* an essential aspect of the gospel ministry. Acceptance of the Christian faith always involves a conflict with opponents (Titus 1:9). The ministry of the gospel inherently involves teaching the truths of Christ *and* exposing error. When militancy is absent the gospel ministry is not faithfully discharged.

Consider this historical example illustrating that omitting militancy is unfaithful to the gospel ministry. In 1957 evangelist Billy Graham said he would preach the gospel anywhere under any sponsorship as long as the gospel was proclaimed, and so he partnered with Roman Catholic and liberal Protestant churchmen. As a result, the gospel *was not* fully proclaimed because Graham *would not* condemn the false teaching, confusion, and compromise of Roman Catholicism and liberal Protestantism.

Militancy is the aggressive exposure of error and compromise. Proclaiming the gospel involves declaring truth. Once truth is declared error must be exposed for what it is. Truth can only be correctly proclaimed as an exclusive commodity. When truth is proclaimed error cannot continue as a legitimate option. There is no demilitarized zone in this spiritual battle—there is the Cause of Christ on the one hand and the forces of darkness on the other. Truly proclaiming the gospel involves a clear, authoritative declaration, “this is what the gospel is” and a just as clear, authoritative refutation, “this is *not* what the gospel is.”

Listen to two men who accurately describe the nature of militancy:

What exactly is militancy, anyway? One dictionary says it is to be “engaged in warfare or combat ... aggressively active (as in a cause).” It springs from one’s values, is expressed as an attitude, and results in certain behavior. One’s **values** are those things in which one strongly believes. They are what one believes to be fundamentally important and true. From this comes an **attitude** which is unwilling to tolerate any divergence from these fundamentally important truths and which seeks to defend them. It results in **behavior** which speaks up when these truths are attacked or diluted and which refuses to cooperate with any activity which would minimize their importance. The term is a military one and carries the idea of defending what one believes to be true (George Houghton, “[The Matter of Militancy](#),” *Faith Pulpit* [May 1994], emphases added).

Militancy is simply being aggressive and combative about the faith, especially the nucleus of crucial doctrine, including the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation in its two-fold structure of separation from apostasy and from disobedient brethren. **Militancy is not to be confused with having a domineering personality nor with mere belligerence for its own sake. It has to do with aggressive adherence to principle rather than the possession of a certain type of personality. Non-militancy cannot be excused on the basis of having a reticent personality.** Everyone is militant about certain things. Those who decry fundamentalist militancy are saying more about what they consider worth defending than about their personalities. Forceful personalities rise to the fore and are entrusted with leadership somewhat naturally. A retiring type of personality may not have the fortitude to lead the battles for the faith, but he can at least stand with and support those who do. It is observable that those who deprecate or minimize militancy are usually quite militant about non-militancy, as oxymoronic as that may seem. Their writings and comments against militant fundamentalists are often classic demonstrations of the militancy they otherwise profess to disdain (Rolland McCune, “[The Self-Identity of Fundamentalism](#),” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* [Spring 1996], pp. 24–25, emphases added).

Militancy is a matter of *obedience*, not *personality*. Militancy is rooted in the exclusive nature of God and His truth—"I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isa 42:8). Militancy has the glory of God, the purity of Christian faith, and the protection of the church as its aims.

A survey of the New Testament demonstrates that militancy—the aggressive exposure of error and compromise—is an essential aspect of the gospel ministry.

- Jesus excoriated the Pharisees—"woe...fools and blind...hypocrites...ye serpents, ye generation of vipers" (Matt 23:13–33)
- "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom 16:17–18).
- Professing believers who are sexually immoral are to be removed from the church, and church members who condone such are strongly admonished (1 Cor 5).
- "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor 11:13–15).
- "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8–9).
- "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph 5:11).
- In his letter of friendship to the Philippians Paul called false teachers "dogs," "enemies of the cross of Christ," and further denunciations (Phil 3:2, 17–21).
- Believers are strongly warned against that which is against the faith (Col 2:8, 16–19).
- "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost...Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess 2:14–16; 5:22).
- "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us...And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess 3:6, 14).

- “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do” (1 Tim 1:3–4).
- “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:19–20).
- “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim 6:3–5).
- “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. 17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim 2:16–18) .
- “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world...Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works” (2 Tim 4:10, 14).
- “For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth” (Titus 1:10–14).
- “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines” (Heb 13:9)
- “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” (James 2:14)
- “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:14–15).
- “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4)
- Peter denounces false teachers in the strongest terms as purveyors of “pernicious ways,” who “walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness,” wholly controlled by sensuality, “which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam,” entirely bereft of anything good and right and deserving their judgment in hell (2 Pet 2)
- John urges believers not to believe everything they hear but to “try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” The one who denies Jesus Christ “is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist...they are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them,” (1 John 4:1–6)

- “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 7–11).
- “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.” (3 John 9–10).
- “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3–4).
- “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev 2:14–16).

The book of Acts gives the historical account of the spread of the gospel throughout the then known world. Note from the following what was part and parcel of gospel ministry:

- Peter said to the Jews that they took Jesus “and by wicked hands have crucified and slain,” 2:23
- Peter said to the Jews “ye denied the Holy One and the Just...and killed the Prince of Life,” 3:14–15
- Stephen said to the Jews that they were “stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit,” 7:51 (the Jews did not merely hold to a different viewpoint)
- Paul said to Simon, “Thy money perish with thee...thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this wickedness,” 8:20–22
- Paul confounded the Jews, 9:22
- Paul said to Elymas, “O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” 13:10
- While in Pisidian Antioch Paul said that the Jews in Jerusalem did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and so condemned and executed Him, 13:27–28
- Paul said that one cannot be saved through the Law of Moses, 13:39
- Paul condemned the attempted idolatry of those in Lystra, 14:15
- Paul and Barnabas “had no small dissension and disputation” with the Judaizers, 15:2, cf. 10–11
- Paul condemned the idolaters of Athens, 17:22–31
- When Paul couldn’t continue with the Jews “he shook his raiment and said unto them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean,’ 18:6
- Apollos “mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly,” 18:28
- Paul withdrew from those who spoke evil of the Way, 19:9
- Paul’s reputation against idolatry was well known, 19:26
- Paul expressed incredulity that Jews didn’t believe in the resurrection, 26:8