

CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

Jude 1-25

Key Verse 3

“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.”

Jude begins the body of his letter saying that although he was eager to write about the salvation we share, he felt compelled to write and urge his readers to contend for the faith—and we really feel how compelled Jude was in this scathing judgment oracle. We also may feel like Jude, and only want to share a positive message of God’s love in such a hostile environment but there is such a great need today to contend for the most holy faith. Is the gospel message precious to you? Do you feel compelled to defend the gospel in our times when you see so many false teachings eroding basic biblical truth? Do you feel compelled to do something about it? I pray through this short but powerful letter that we may also be compelled by the Spirit to fight for our faith by clearly and unashamedly teaching people the truth of the gospel in our times.

First, Called, loved, kept (1-2).

The letter begins by telling us that it is written by Jude. Actually in the Greek, it is Judas the Greek form of Judah, not Jude, but Jude is used to help us differentiate him from the several other Judas’s, especially Judas Iscariot. Judas was very likely the youngest half-brother of Jesus (Mt 13:55) since he calls himself the brother of James. Yet, Jude here identifies himself as a servant (in Greek *doulos*) more properly slave, bondservant of Jesus Christ. During Jesus’ lifetime even after such powerful ministry and miracles, Jude thought Jesus was out of his mind (Mk 3:21, 31) and told Jesus to become a public icon because he didn’t believe (Jn 7:3-5). But after meeting the risen Christ (1 Co 15:7) Jude had an incredible change. Immediately after Jesus’ ascension we read that Jesus’ brothers were among the believers in the upper room (Acts 1:14). Later he went on mission journeys together with his wife (1 Co 9:5). And in this short letter, we really see he is a respected leader and we feel the deep love and shepherd’s care over his beloved, dear friends in Christ. What an amazing change came over Jude! Praise God, that anyone who truly meets Jesus can be changed into such a shepherd.

Jude begins and ends the letter with assurances for the believers. He says, “To those who have been called” (1b). There is no one in our church or in theirs who was there on accident. True believers didn’t stumble upon Jesus like clickbait, or because of a random suggestion algorithm, or even because another Christian invited us. God called us, because we “are beloved in God the Father...” (1b ESV). And so, we are “kept for [or by, or in] Jesus

Christ” (1b). In contrast to the Apostates who are harshly judged in this letter, Jude assures the believers at the beginning and end of the letter who they are in Christ: called, beloved, kept. “Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.”

Second, Jude’s urgent request to the church (3-4).

Let’s read verse 3 together, “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was one for all entrusted to God’s holy people.” It’s very interesting, Jude had originally intended to write a very happy message that would make them feel warm and in love with Jesus. But he was compelled, that is necessitated, violently forced to change his topic. He saw that the much more critical need was that he urge them to contend for the faith. Jude is almost idea for idea exactly the same as 2 Peter 2, where Peter also shares a strong indictment against false teachers—it seems to be the source material for Jude’s letter. There was a spiritual pandemic in their time as many enemies rose up that could have destroyed the young church. Something had to be done. Jude urged them to fight.

Contend is not such a comfortable word. It reminds us of a contender, a boxer, someone fighting against everybody. The Greek root of the word is to agonize, to strive and wrestle. These days many only want positive, encouraging messages, to be liked and not offend anyone. It’s tempting to just get into our Christian bubble, be inward focused and not engage the culture which seems hopeless to change and so we withdraw. Having a fighting spirit or singing hymns like “Onward Christian Soldiers” seems to be out of touch with our modern times. Yet, here is the spunky book of Jude that contends for the faith without shame, with strong fighting language and that urges the church to do the same. So, we have to deal with this book and God intention for the church. Why should we contend for the faith? Let’s think about a few reasons.

First we see that Jude refers to this church as his dear friends or more properly “beloved.” The usage carries the meaning not of new friends but people who had history. These were people that he knew well and cared for deeply. Jude didn’t want to fight just to prove a point or to be superior to others but to protect those he loved. They were Jude’s beloved and he was like a mother bear defending her cubs. How about you, do you feel compelled to battle false doctrines in our time that threaten the faith of young believers? Do you care enough to feel distressed when young believers are pulled away by lies? Do you feel compelled to defend these beloved little ones whom Jesus called?

Second, Jude says that we should contend for the faith because it was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people. Here “once for all” means “once and for all completed.” This one and only way of salvation and eternal life that all history has been leading up to and all the prophets longed for and all creation has been groaning for is now complete and has been entrusted to God’s holy people—that is the church. When Peter confessed Jesus, “You are

the Messiah the Son of the living God,” Jesus said that he would establish the church on that confession and give them the keys to unlock the kingdom of heaven (Mt 16:16-17). Sometimes we forget what it is that we are fighting for. We are not contending for our particular church tradition, or for Christian values, or freedom of religion we are contending for THE faith: faith in Jesus Christ who suffered and died on the cross to save all people from eternal condemnation. We forget how precious the gospel is but faith in Jesus is the ONLY way that God has made for all people to be saved. Peter says about the name of Jesus, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Ro 1:16). Too often these days, believers are wasting too much time and energy apologizing for the gospel when they should be contending for it. It’s the only tool in our toolbox and it’s the only one we need. God has entrusted the church with the keys to the kingdom this is one set of keys that we cannot lose.

Third, Jude tells us to contend for the faith because it is under attack. Verse 4 says, “For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you.” These individuals had slipped into the church pretending to be Christians. False teachers are sneaky and pervasive. The other week I asked my CBF kids, how many false teachers are you letting into your homes during the lockdown? Actually, we don’t even need to open physical doors to let them in anymore, there are innumerable virtual doors into our homes. YouTube is full of false teachers. A person used to need confirmation from a church or seminary to preach but these days anyone with a webcam or a blog can influence others and it’s not always apparent that they’re telling half the truth or that their life doesn’t live up to their teaching. I’m sure on your router you’ve enabled strong filters for explicit material on the internet but do you have a filter for false teaching? I’ve looked there’s no such setting. We’re reading and watching all the time and we don’t even realize the way that so many false influences secretly slip in.

Who were these people and what were they teaching? Look at verse 4 again. “They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” Jude calls these false teachers “ungodly,” that is completely lacking any reverence for God or sacred things. The word ungodly or ungodliness is used 5 times about them in short letter¹. A total lack of reverence for God defined these people. Specifically, they taught that since Christ forgave all our sins, that believers were free to engage in immorality or debauchery, that is unrestrained sensual sin. This teaching flowed right out of Greek thought on dualism (flesh is evil, spirit is good, so it doesn’t matter what you do in the flesh) and this thinking was everywhere at that time, leading to rampant immorality. What about in our day? Do some Christians teach that

¹ The word ungodly doesn’t appear in the Greek text in verse 8 but is included to clarify the change of subject back to the false teachers.

God's grace excuses some people's unrepentant immoral lifestyles? It's one of the biggest areas of controversy among Christians today. So much immorality is being normalized and many Christians are just going with it, or worse trying to bend what the Bible says to the culture—the fallout on the church has been devastating.

Ultimately, they deny Jesus Christ as the only Sovereign and Lord. If Jesus is the Sovereign the one with immeasurable power and unlimited, absolute dominion and he is our Lord, the Master of our lives, the head of our church, then every viewpoint we have about our world, everything we think, reason, say and do must all begin with Jesus as revealed in the Bible. But all false teaching has a wrong starting point. False teachers start with themselves instead of with Jesus Christ the only Sovereign and Lord. False teachers go away from sound Bible teaching because they refuse to let go of their own idea that is incompatible with the Bible. They invent their own Jesus that is not the Jesus of the Bible. If we are discerning there are so many different Jesus' out there—such as the Jesus who doesn't call us to mission, the Jesus who only wants us to be happy, the Jesus who doesn't require obedience but only wants to make us the best version of ourself. The true Jesus of the Bible says unless you repent you are in danger of the fires of hell (Lk 13:3), that if anyone would come after him they must deny themselves take up their cross daily and follow him (Lk 9:23), who tells us to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation (Mt 28:19). This is the Jesus who was butchered on a cross to show us how horrifyingly serious sin is to God. This is the Jesus who when he heard that his friend Lazarus, whom he loved, was sick, purposely waited 2 days so that his friend would die, so that he would be glorified and people would believe. He is the Sovereign Lord it is ALL about him, NOT about us, everything begins from him.

We may wonder how is it that people that were teaching unrestrained sensuality and denied Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord were able to stay in the church without getting thrown out? Well, there's only one explanation: either the church was being too nice, too naïve or too complacent to call them out, or they were not seeing God's perspective about such people. We are commanded to love all people even to love our enemies. But that does not mean that we tolerate their teaching, or remain silent about their lies, or turn a blind eye to their sin and influence.

One young girl who was surrounded by friends who identified as gay and bisexual, began to read the plethora of false teachings on sexuality. And it made her begin to question God's word and love, and she even began to think SHE was gay. She began to harm herself and considered suicide. Her parents and Bible teacher immediately began to contend for her and she came back to the light and deeply accepted God's grace and prays to strengthen her faith. It's not her fault. This is the power of the dark false teachings of our time, they can literally kill. We can't be friendly or naïve with this stuff. We need to fight because the stakes for young believers, who are so easily influenced, couldn't be higher.

The responsibility and urgency of the call to contend for truth is ours even today. We might have an inclination to retreat from public discourse because it is messy and sometimes painful. Whenever we share the gospel, there is contention. We can't make it more palatable, God told us that the cross will always be an offense to the unsaved. I was a little sorry as I considered this message that since I began teaching CBF I haven't contended with unbelievers like I did in the past. When I preached the gospel at MVCC, at UIC, at NU, at NEIU one thing was always the same, when I told people about Jesus I was persecuted by some and others came to faith in Jesus Christ one person at a time. Yet when I examined my heart, I saw that my fighting spirit has diminished and timidity and inhibition had settled in. May God reawaken us as a church with a fighting spirit to contend for the faith, so that Satan may not lead astray all the young people of our generation.

How can we contend for the faith?

Third, Call out false teachers and have God's perspective about them (5-25).

It's helpful to look at how Jude contended for the faith in this letter. Most importantly, he had spiritual discernment to identify the false teachers in his time, in his church, in his sheep. He called out the evil they were doing and helped believers to have God's perspective about them—I'll give you a clue, it wasn't God loves them and they'll be fine. Jude reminds them that God chose and rescued the people of Israel with a mighty hand and brought them to a land overflowing with milk and honey. Yet, when the Israelites refused to believe that God would give them victory over the Canaanites, God destroyed every single one of the unbelievers that he had originally saved (5). Angels are glorious, powerful, beings who are ever before God's presence and converse with him, if anyone should be safe from judgment surely it is them. But when angels rebelled against God, 2 Peter 2:4 tells us they were sent to hell in darkness, bound with everlasting chains until the Judgement Day when they will be brought before the throne of Jesus our Sovereign Lord (6). Sodom and Gomorrah are the archetype for wicked immorality in the Bible and specifically Jude mentions that "they gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion" referring to their homosexuality (7). Their judgment with fire and brimstone was meant to be a horrifying warning to any society that gives themselves over to sin.

How much more, these false teachers were inviting terrible eternal judgment upon themselves. On the authority of their dreams they rejected the teachings of Scripture and like the Sodomites gave themselves over to all kinds of sexual immorality, polluting their bodies (8). Rather than acknowledging that they were under demonic influence and begging God for help, they made fun of "celestial beings" meaning demons. Jude refers to a story that has been lost to time, probably from the first century Jewish devotional "The Assumption of Moses," to simply say that even angels, who have much more authority than man didn't dare to accuse the devil but trusted in the God's power (9). These men had no spiritual understanding. Rather, like irrational animals they barked at spiritual things, that

they didn't know the slightest thing about, and that very spiritual reality is what would lead to their destruction and eternal condemnation (10).

“Woe to them!” These ungodly people could have remained among the believers and became brothers and sisters but instead they would be under horrible judgment. How did it happen? They refused God's command and warning. Like Cain, who refused God's loving warning and followed his passions (11). Like Balaam's who was called a prophet of God but disobeyed God's command in order to get rich (Nu 31). Like Korah a prominent leader in the Israelite community who refused to accept God's appointed leadership and started a rebellion and was swallowed up by the earth.

These teachers must have had some quality that attracted others but upon closer examination, they were shameless, self-centered and hollow. Amazingly, after all their carousing they went to the love feast at the church, that is the Lord's Supper—communion. Now, I don't know about you but when I hear at communion, “Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves” (1 Co 11:28-29), I confess everything and repent and beg God for help. But they ate without the slightest qualm—Peter tells us even laughing about their exploits and looking around lustfully at the girls in church (2 Peter 2:13-14). They promised freedom to people but they were themselves slaves of depravity (2 Peter 2:19), they couldn't help anyone. They were shepherds who only fed themselves. Such a shepherd is not a shepherd at all, a shepherd should be able to actually take care of the sheep and bring them to pasture or they're not actually a shepherd (12). They were like a cloud that should have life-giving rain but somehow they are empty and dissipate in the wind. They were trees at harvest time but with no fruit, useless and uprooted twice dead. They were like a turbulent sea whose waves churned up all the filth hidden beneath the surface (13). They were like stars that refused to follow their set course that would fly out into the black empty black void of space. The blackest darkness of hell was reserved for them forever.

Though false teachers may seem to enjoy the spotlight for a time final judgment will come upon them with absolute finality. Quoting another Jewish Devotional 1 Enoch, Jude echoed Revelation and the coming judgment of Jesus who will descend with thousands upon thousands of his angels to judge every ungodly action and word uttered by ungodly people (14-15).

Beloved, we must learn to discern who such people are. Which preachers are you listening to? Which authors are shaping your Christian worldview? Be careful who you listen to. I was shocked when one family suddenly became consumed with doubts and left our ministry several years ago. It happened from one strange book authored by a good Christian author but in fact written and coauthored by a strange false teacher; and one YouTube preacher with a particular focus whom they took out of context. After those ideas had taken root

there was nothing I could say to bring them back. Look carefully at who you are letting teach you. Look at their life, look at the fruit of their ministry. Jude said, “These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage” (16). The Apostles had foretold them that such people would come perhaps referring to 2 Peter 2:1-2. They said that scoffers would come following their own ungodly desires—there it is again (17-18). Overwhelmingly Jude tells us that a real teacher has learned how to overcome temptation, they follow God and not sinful desires—this is basic. False teachers can be clearly seen because they are divisive people they cause division in the church—this is clearly not God’s will and leading but of the devil (19). But maybe most clearly they are people who do not have the Spirit they only act on instinct. They have no spiritual discernment or insight. They have no prayer life. They have no fruit of the Spirit growing in them day by day.

Beloved, in contrast to all that we have learned about these ungodly, empty, self-centered, divisive people, real believers must build themselves up in the most holy faith (20). The best defense for our heart and mind is if we are deeply rooted in God’s word, in the gospel that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people. Even then false teachings are dangerous but when the Bible is circulating through us we have a proper lens for filtering everything that we take in. Second we must be “praying in the Holy Spirit” about all things at all times that we may discern God’s will from our own dreams and Satan’s lies. And last we must keep ourselves in God’s love as we wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life (21).

Finally Jude reminds us who it is that we are fighting. In contending for the faith, we must remember who the real enemy is. We shouldn’t be fighting against young believers who doubt or are caught in sin, we fight the false teachers that are leading them astray. We should be merciful to those who doubt (22). And those who are caught in sin, in danger of falling away don’t harshly criticize them but snatch them from the fire, rescue them—hate their sin but not the person (Gal 6:1). But in the process of dealing with those who have become really addicted to sin approach them with holy fear, and as Jesus teaches, bring a companion so that you may not be corrupted (23, Mt 18:16).

Jude ends as he began. Though we are in difficult times with so many pitfalls and enemies of Christ, Jude assures us, “[Jesus] is able to keep you from stumbling and present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy (24). To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (24-25) Beloved, let’s hear God’s urgent call. We live in difficult times but let us come together as a church, putting aside lesser things, recognizing our real enemy and join with Jesus to contend for the faith in our generation. May God be with us.