

Jude 17-23

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. [NIV]

We're in Jude again this morning, if you have a Bible and you'd care to turn there. Jude, verses 17 through 23 is our text, where he continues his assessment of those false teachers who had invaded the church there, and who, by their rejection of God's design for sexual morality, were putting a number of the church members in eternal danger.

Those false teachers were gnostic in their thinking, which means they were convinced that they possessed a special, higher knowledge about these sorts of matters than the typical knuckle-dragging church member, you see? They fancied themselves "divine depositories" of special knowledge that the church should consider itself blessed to receive.

And this special knowledge which they claimed to have was *antinomian* in nature. They were convinced that God's grace would cover every sin, to the point that it didn't really matter how they acted or what they gave themselves to, sexually or morally. They felt they could live however they liked, and God would forgive them in the end.

So, all this led to a level of arrogance and presumption upon God's grace that was both alarming and infuriating to Jude, given the way he writes here against it all. It was infuriating because it was slandering God's character and disregarding both His word and His will. And it was alarming to Jude because, well, you just can't slander God's character and disregard His will for long without suffering consequences – even *eternal* consequences.

How I wish our nation – our people could see this truth today!

So many in our nation are doing just these things.

Some are slandering God's character by saying, "Oh, God is fine with that sort of behavior," be it sexual, ethical, rebellious, racial, or material. "God is just fine with that," when, in fact, He isn't fine with it at all. By either contorting or neglecting God's word, they presume to speak for God when they really don't.

And then, of course, there are others who simply reject any notion of God or of a higher power – or a divine will or a true good, and in so doing, utterly reject God's will.

"Truth is what you make it; good is whatever you think it is; there is no sense of better or worse, no reality of good and bad. It's my life – I'll live it however I choose." Those sentiments are more alive and well in our nation than maybe we even realized six months ago.

But again, the thing is – whether it was in Jude's day in the first century or in our day here in the 21st century, you can't slander God's character or disregard His will for long without suffering consequences – and even eternal consequences.

Jude knew that, and so he writes to try to save this church from just those consequences: both the pain that comes in this life from rejecting God's ways *and* the eternal pain that comes from putting your hand in God's face and saying, "I don't need you; I don't want you; and I don't care what you say."

That is the end to which these false teachers were pushing this church, and Jude writes to push back against it.

So far, he has described the deceitful character of this infestation of false teachers in a variety of ways – painting pictures that may seem odd to us, but that certainly didn't to Jude's original readers. Jude has painted pictures of liars and dividers – of proud, arrogant, greedy, self-absorbed people who will, by any means possible, attempt to justify their behavior and get their way.

This makes up the bulk of the letter – describing that which is dangerous.

But now, he changes gears.

Up to now, more or less, he's described the problem.

Now he describes the solution – that solution to which he alluded clear back in verse 3 where he said, "*I urge you to contend for the faith.*"

"You now know what the problem is. So, what do you do about it? How do you handle it? How do you contend for – fight for, stand for, defend – the true Christian faith?"

Jude answers that question regarding both ourselves and others.

First, regarding ourselves, Jude gives five ways to contend for our faith.

The *first* is a word – a concept you see over and over and over again in the Bible when God Himself, or one of His prophets, speaks to His people. And that word is "remember."

How many times does God say that to His people when they are facing crises, when they're confused, when they seem to be overpowered, when they're in trouble, when they've lost their way, or when they don't know what to do?

The first word God very typically gives is to look backward – to remember that there really is nothing new under the sun, as Solomon (we presume) wrote in Ecclesiastes.

You see, no matter where we are—in some way, we've been there before.

Now, that's not to say, in any way, that time is cyclical. This is no defense of the circle of life and all that Disney new age nonsense.

Time is linear, certainly.

But you see, ever since we were raised up, God's people have experienced persecution, oppression, and rejection—same stuff, over and over again. And God saw it all coming. I mean, anyone who stands for right in a world that stands for wrong can expect to feel some heat.

And that's just what we see here. Jesus and the apostles all predicted something along these lines would happen: that people would come to try to corrupt the church, to change the gospel, to twist God's words and ways to suit themselves.

The point is, slander against God is nothing new. Experiencing difficulty for standing for God is mainstream for His people. It's just something that's part of our faith.

So, Jude says kindly, "Child of God, wipe that look of shocked disbelief off your face—this is just reality. It's always been, and we've been warned long ago about it. It's part of what you sign up for when you sign up for Jesus."

You contend for your faith, first by remembering what has been foretold about people like this.¹

Second, Jude says, "Build yourselves up in your most holy faith." Build yourselves up in your most holy faith.

There's a principle at work in our fallen world, and that is: there really is no place of neutral. No one really ever just sits still. We're always moving, and if you're not moving forward, then you are—because of the state of our world—drifting backward.

If you do not keep up a house, it will slowly fall apart.

If you do not keep up your yard, it will slowly turn into a jungle.

If you are not exercising your brain or lungs or any other organ or muscle—it will turn to mush. That's just how things work here.

I was doing great in the weight room for a couple of years—until this past March when the weight rooms closed. Ever since, I've gained fat and lost muscle. There're lots of words for that; in my case, "lazy" and "pathetic" come quickly to mind, but the scientific word is "entropy."

And it's all due to the fall, you see? Ever since Eden, our world has been on this course toward chaos, and unless you intentionally push back at it, that's where we go.

The same is true, Jude is saying here, of our faith in Christ.

Now—do we save ourselves?

Of course not. Only Jesus could do what it took to repair our relationship with God. Only Jesus saves.

But do we have a part in building and growing our faith in Jesus?

Absolutely! And if you neglect that, if you don't exercise the faith muscle and intentionally build it, if you don't make decisions and do things to strengthen it, just

like any other muscle, it will turn to mush, and it will fail you just when you need it most.

In order to successfully contend for our faith, we have to take the responsibility to build faith in us however we can. God helps—God comes alongside, but ours is an important part.

It's like the preacher who passed by the farmer tending his large, beautiful garden and said, "My, that's quite a garden that you and the Lord have going there."

The farmer replied, "Ha - you should have seen it when the Lord had it all to Himself."

Jude reminds us that contending for our faith means investing intentional efforts toward building it up.

Third, Jude says we need to pray in the Spirit.

Contrary to the false teachers who mistakenly claimed their dreams of sexual immorality were God-given, contending for the faith means Christ-followers commune with God according to the true power and influence of His Holy Spirit.

We depend on Him and His direction and His intermediation to hear accurately from God the Father.

Those false teachers, they imagined they'd heard from God, but what they'd heard stood in direct contrast with God's word.

God's Spirit doesn't do that—God doesn't give visions of ungodliness—because God is One. That's how we know that it's God who's talking—how the subjective and objective go together.

And that's required for contending for the true faith: praying—communicating with God in dependence on His Spirit.

Jude says next (**fourth**), "*keep yourselves in God's love.*"

This may sound odd to us. It almost sounds heretical, as if we can make ourselves more love-able to God.

But this is a Scriptural principle.

At the same time God keeps us in Christ, so do we also keep ourselves in God.

We see this same principle in the Apostle Paul, where he writes to the Philippian church: "*...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*" [Phil. 2:12-13, NIV]

Work hard to show the results of your salvation—because God is working in you.

The apostle John, quoting Jesus, also mentions this idea. In John 15, Jesus says, "remain in my love."

How?

He goes on, **by keeping my commandments.** "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.*" [John 15:9-10, NIV]

You see, we keep ourselves in Him—in His love. We remain in Christ, Jesus Himself says, **by keeping His word—by keeping His commands.**

¹ Matt 24:4-5, 11, 23-24; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Thess 2:3-12; 1 Tim 4:1-5; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 Peter 3:3

So being careful to do as He says – not just to trust, but trust and obey, as the hymn says, that’s part of being able to effectively contend for our faith.

And then *finally*, Jude says there in verse 21, we contend for the faith, “*by waiting for the mercy of Jesus to bring us to life eternal.*”

There is a mind-set – a perspective that one contending for the faith has, and it is one of expectation for something better to come. Those who will be able to successfully contend for the faith – to stand for the faith in this troubled world, are convinced that there will be a reward for them when Jesus returns – when He assumes complete control of this world, and also that injustice and wrong will receive their due consequence.

We’re not just biding time, you see? We’re waiting for something on the horizon, and the hope of that age to come helps us live in confidence and victory in the present days.

This sort of waiting is found all through the New Testament:

In Luke 2, both Simeon and Anna were waiting.

Jesus gave us the image, in Luke 12, of the servants waiting for their master to return.

In Titus, Paul describes believers as those waiting for a blessed hope.

We wait for the day that the wheat will be separated from the weeds, the good fish from the bad fish – images from Jesus, who then says that in that day, the righteous will shine like the sun.²

This is the perspective that successful contenders have to have, you see – the confidence that the reward is worth waiting for. We have to know that the prize is worth the fight.

How do we contend for the faith in a day when there are challenges from within the church – when people we thought we could trust wind up off in some huge, spiritual error and try to convince us that it’s true? That’s what Jude is writing to address.

But those weren’t the only challenges to followers of Christ – in Jude’s day or ours.

There was, and still is, much that challenges faith in Jesus from outside the church – from secularists, from those who deny God’s existence, from those who see many, many ways to God and glory, from those who believe government is savior or Allah is savior or Buddha is savior.

And then, there are those times our faith is also challenged by doubts that rise up inside us: we wonder where God is in days of tragedy and pandemic – in days of political turmoil – when people we trust let us down – in the midst of what seems to be the tearing apart of the fabric of a culture.

Are these kinds of things new – new to us, new to our time, unprecedented before now?

No, not really. That things like these happen should not surprise us. You can find circumstances like the ones Jude faced today, and you can find circumstances like we face today in ages and nations past.

The fact that we live in a broken troubled world has not changed.

But, the great news is, the prescription for getting through broken, troubled days with faith intact and triumphant has not changed either! The prescription for victorious faith has always been the same – from Jesus to Paul to Peter to Jude:

1) **Remember** – any resistance, any challenge, any deniers, any dividers, any push back against faith in Christ that you feel was predicted by Jesus Himself. Resistance against Him, in any and every age, does not take Him by surprise, so it shouldn’t take us by surprise. There is great peace of mind and heart in remembering that.

2) **Build up your faith** – we have a part in using and developing the faith muscle – if you don’t use it, you lose it.

3) **Pray in the Holy Spirit** – submit ourselves to the will of God and pray for His Kingdom to come and will to be done, even if we don’t understand fully what that may look like at the moment.

4) **Keep yourselves in God’s love** – how? Jesus says, by obeying His commands – by doing as He says.

5) **Wait for Jesus to bring you to eternal life.** Recall that we are waiting for a better age – a better time, and that that age and time is well, well worth the costs of today.

Remember the past.

Build your faith.

Pray in the Spirit.

Obey God’s commands.

Know that there is a tomorrow worth waiting for.

According to Jude, that is the way to confront challenges – to contend for the faith in difficult days.

There’s nothing really new in there, is there? No, that’s really the witness of Scripture from front to back. That’s how the Bible has always said, more or less, how we humans can get on with God. No surprises here.

I guess the real surprise about all this is how easily people of faith forget it – or try to find shortcuts around it – or substitutes for it – or somehow believe that we can neglect some or all of it and still stay spiritually strong.

To all of that, Jude would say, “Nope – it just doesn’t work like that. It didn’t for those to whom he wrote, and it doesn’t for Christians today. We’ll fall to heresy; we’ll fall to division; we’ll fall to secular pressures; we’ll fall to false gods; we’ll fall to something, somehow, someday – if we fail to do what’s necessary to contend for the faith.

Friends, our day is no day to be lax about our faith.

Just like in Jude’s day, there are challenges from all sides, and if we are to meet those challenges and come through them spiritually sound and victorious, we’d better know how to contend for what we believe.

Jude’s showing us the way.

It’s the way of old.

Will you walk in it?

Prayer:

Lord, I think that’s what You want to know from all of us today: will we walk in Your way – will we contend for this faith that we’ve chosen to believe is true?

There is much around us today that threatens to steal our time, our energies, our peace, our sense of well-being, and even our trust in You if we’ll let that happen.

² Matthew 13:40-43, 47-48

God, let us not let that happen.

Through Jude, You show us the way of endurance – You give us the prescription for lasting faith – strong faith – joyful faith – contagious faith. May we take it seriously, for our good, for the good of those around us, and frankly for the hope of our people and our world. Amen.

Closing Song

Conclusion:

There are two sides to this “contending for the faith” thing.

This week, we saw Jude’s instructions to us about contending – internally – what do we have to do within us to be contenders.

Next week, we’ll look at what contending for faith looks like in dealing with others – how we respond to others – even those who challenge us.

But to do that successfully, we have to be spiritually strong – spiritually prepared.

It’s like when you’re flying and, before you take off, the attendants go through all the stuff about what you have to do in case the cabin depressurizes. Remember that? They say, make sure you put the oxygen mask on yourself before you try to help other people.

Why? Because unless we’re able to contend ourselves, no matter how much we want to help someone else, we won’t be able to, really, in the long run.

In difficult days, in troubling times, in the midst of challenges of all sorts, the best thing we can do – the most truly helpful thing we can do for others, the first thing we have to do – is make sure our faith is sound, to make sure we’re staying spiritually fit so we can calmly, fearlessly, winsomely and lovingly speak God’s truth to our troubled world – contending for the faith our world needs to hear, representing the Savior our world needs to know.

May the Lord help us in this, and especially so in these days.