

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 particular 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, what they did with their bodies, 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 that 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, both earthly and eternal.

Jude knew that, and so he writes trying to save this church from just those consequences.

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

His arguments describing the danger make up the bulk of the letter.

But now, Jude changes gears and begins to describe the solution – that solution to which he alluded clear back in verse 3 where he said, "*I urge you to contend for the faith.*" "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 gives five ways: five means of successfully standing for – contending for – our faith in Jesus.

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

This is the first thing that God so often says 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** and to remember things that have happened before.

Because remembering what's happened before reminds us that, as Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, there really is nothing new under the sun. 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, false teaching, trouble of all different kinds – same stuff, over and over again.

And, the thing is, 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, some resistance, some push-back.

And that's just what we see here. Jesus Himself, as well as the apostles, 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.

So, you see, slander against God is nothing new.

People who try to say that God said something He didn't is nothing new.

And, the challenge of thinking through and sorting through all that is nothing new. That kind of experience is just mainstream for God's people. Experiencing challenges and learning how to push back against them is just part of what you sign up for when you sign up for Jesus.

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 false teachers and other challenges.¹

Remember.

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

There's a principle at work in our fallen world that says, there really is no place of true neutral. No one is ever really in neutral. No one really ever just sits still. We're always moving, one way or another. If we're not moving forward, then we 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 or your garden, 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."

Things don't tend toward order. You have to work to get order, and in our world, unless you are working toward order, you are moving toward chaos.

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, he's not saying that we save ourselves.

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

But we do, absolutely, have a part in building and growing our faith in Jesus. And if we neglect our part, if

we don't exercise the faith muscle and intentionally build it, if we don't make decisions and do things to strengthen it, just like any other muscle, given a little time, it will turn to mush. And then our faith, our confidence in Jesus, will fail us just when we need it most – like when it is challenged, just as the faith of these friends of Jude was being challenged, you see?

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. He loves to do that, actually, but we have a big part in building our faith, our trust in Jesus.

It's like the story of the preacher who passed by the farmer tending his large, beautiful garden. He looked over the neat, well-planned, well-kept plot and said to the farmer, "My, that's quite a garden that you and the Lord have going."

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

We have a part, you see, in building our faith and trust in Jesus, and Jude says, "Don't neglect that responsibility and effort. Build up your faith."

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

Third, Jude says successfully contending for our faith includes the need to pray in the Spirit.

To stand successfully in faith, Christ-followers must commune with God according to the true power and influence of His Holy Spirit. We depend on Him and His direction and mediation to hear accurately from God the Father.

Those false teachers, they claimed to have heard from God, but what they'd heard stood in direct contrast with God's word and character.

God's Spirit doesn't contradict God's word and character. God's Spirit doesn't give God's people visions of ungodliness – because God is One. That's how we know that it's God who's talking to us: when the subjective and objective go together.

When the Spirit affirms the Word, and the word confirms the Spirit.

Successfully contending for faith in Christ requires 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 lovable 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 idea 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]

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

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

Jesus Himself puts the same idea this way when He says, according to John 15, “**Remain in my love.**”

Jesus tells us to remain in His love. And then He tells us how to do that: **by keeping my commandments.** “**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.**”

You see, we keep ourselves in Him, in His love. We keep ourselves close to Him, more and more strongly connected to Him. Jesus Himself says, **by keeping His word – by keeping His commands – by doing as He says.**

Really living in Christ is not just a work of the mind, it’s the working out of life. As the song says, it’s not just trusting, but trusting and obeying, that allows us 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 anticipation, of expecting something better to come.

Jude says 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.

Waiting for Jesus to bring us to eternal life.

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 – waiting for what God had promised, and their waiting affected everything about their lives and days.

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

Jesus Himself gave us the image, in Luke 12, of the servants waiting for their master to return. The servants’ waiting affected their lives, their decisions, their priorities, how they handled their day-to-day challenges and troubles. Everything they experienced was in light of the day they knew they’d see their master come over the hill.

We wait for the day that the wheat will be separated from the weeds – the good fish from the bad fish. Jesus gave us those images, and He says that on 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 there is a reward coming, and that reward is worth waiting for, and at times it is worth fighting 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 Peter to Paul 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 His 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 –

² Matthew 13:40-43, 47-48

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 as 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 is 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.

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.

Time to think about contending:

Remember the past.

Build your faith.

Pray in the Spirit.

Obey God’s commands.

Know that, for those in Jesus, there is a tomorrow worth waiting for.

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.