

Contend for the Faith - Jude 1:1-25

Scripture Reading: 1Timothy 4:1-16

Introduction

The beginning of the Church Age is recorded for us in the Bible book we know as the Acts of the Apostles. Its pages describe the deeds and teachings of the men of God through whom Christ began to build his Church. The time period it details could well be called the “golden age of the Church”.

It was a time of great excitement as the Church started out very well; but trouble was not long in coming.

This morning we are going to be looking at the Epistle of Jude which might well be called the Acts of the Apostates. Written sometime 30-50 years after the church began, Jude is the last epistle in the New Testament.

And it fittingly stands on the threshold of the book of Revelation which describes how the Church will end.

Jude’s epistle relates the deeds and teachings of evil men who have infiltrated and tried to subvert the church almost from day one and who will continue to do so until the return of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The greatest danger to the Church has never been from outside; from the pagans.

Rather, the Church has always faced greater peril from those who falsely claim to be brothers attacking from the inside. We see that all around us today.

Our biggest threat isn’t from other faiths but from those who are slowly, subtly watering down the teachings of Scripture.

In our Bible colleges and seminaries those who will lead our churches are taught that we have, for centuries, interpreted Scripture incorrectly.

That Genesis doesn’t tell us “how” God created the heavens and the earth, it simply gives us a framework for understanding how God brought order to the world.

We are told that we have misinterpreted the Apostle Paul’s writings and that he never meant to imply salvation by faith alone, but that Paul really meant to say that only some works don’t count for salvation, but others do.

These views are referred to as “new perspectives” or “new ways of understanding”.

But when you begin to weaken Scripture, as these new ideas do, the Bible loses its basis for authority.

After casting doubt on Scripture as a reliable source of morality, it’s no surprise we turn to the consensus of society.

For instance, we live in a time and place where, even within the professing church, the idea exists that all consensual behavior is good, or at least beyond judgment, and that any desire serves as its own justification for it.

And if we can get our government to say something is legal – well, then, it must be right, right?

Insisting on a biblical standard of morality is seen as old-fashioned, out of touch, intolerant, or just plain mean.

And we are told that we need to be open and affirming of any and all choices and to do otherwise is unloving and judgmental.

Those are the messages you will hear if you go and sit in many churches.

And it’s these types of attacks from within the Church that Jude addresses in his little letter.

The Epistle of Jude is rather short, only 25 verses, but it is forceful.

Its message fairly shouts from the page as the author uses powerful imagery and language.

Author, Audience, and Reason for the Letter

Turning to the letter, we see that the author identifies himself simply as,

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James

While there is some minor academic controversy, the general consensus is that this Jude is the half-brother of Jesus. But notice that he describes his relationship to Jesus as that of “servant” or, more literally, “bondservant” of Jesus Christ. Here we have a man who grew up with Jesus and James but has now learned to see and accept Jesus as he truly was, God in the flesh.

What a clear testimony this is to the deity of the Lord Jesus from a man who was in a position, if anyone was, to refute it. Although Jude and his brothers didn’t believe in Jesus until after his resurrection, he now calls himself Jesus’ slave. Next, we see that he wrote the letter to some unspecified group of believers, to whom he issues a standard N.T. benediction:

To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: may mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

Then, in **verse 3**, he tells us how he came to write the letter:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Jude had wanted very much to write a very different letter.

One that contained certain insights about the doctrine of salvation.

We don’t know what that letter might have said because, if he ever wrote it, God didn’t see fit to preserve it for us. But now he feels constrained by the Holy Spirit to write a very strong appeal that instructs his original recipients to,

“contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

I want to take the time to point out four things about Jude’s appeal.

First, the “faith” that Jude is writing about is the SUM of what Christians believe.

It consists of both the Old and New Testaments – the entirety of apostolic teaching - God’s Word to us.

Second, this faith is not something that was made up or manufactured; it was delivered to us.

It is one body of facts, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and GIVEN to us by God through the human authors of Scripture.

Third, the faith was delivered “once for all”.

It was given at one time.

It was COMPLETE as given and does not need any additions or revisions.

In other words, God is not still speaking today in terms of new revelation.

Fourth, the faith needs to be put forth.

That’s what contending for the faith means – proclaim it in word and deed –we contend for the faith by SPEAKING it and LIVING it.

Now, some believe that contending for the faith requires us to be contentious.

It’s not uncommon for us to want to use the Bible as a club with which to beat people who disagree with us over the head.

But this isn’t at all what Jude has in mind –contending for the faith is *not* being quarrelsome about the faith.

The faith that Jude is writing about is God’s own truth – capital T Truth.

What Jude means by “contend for the faith” is simply to continually proclaim the truth with our voices and our conduct.

We don't have to fight so as to defend God's truth

Charles Spurgeon once said, "The truth is like a lion. Whoever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose and it will defend itself."

That's the way God's Word is

When we are faithful to proclaim it, to speak it and to live it – when we simply turn it loose, our faith defends itself.

And Jude wrote this letter, under compulsion of the Holy Spirit, to instruct and encourage its recipients to contend for the faith.

Description of the Apostates

In **verse 4** he reveals why he found this necessary

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude writes that certain "creepers" had sneaked in and settled down alongside the true believers without being detected

Which means, at least according to outward appearances, they seemed to be upright and good men

But Jude recorded three characteristics of these "creepers"

First, he writes that they are ungodly

Being UNGODLY means to be without a reverential awe toward God or to lack the fear of God

But their lack of respect for God wasn't necessarily outward or overt disrespect

Remember, they crept in unnoticed so they likely demonstrated a faux fear of God and talked a good game

But godliness is a matter of the heart and when the heart doesn't reverence God, the Holy Spirit labels that heart "ungodly."

Second, Jude says that the creepers "pervert the grace of God into sensuality"

Distortion of the doctrine of grace is one of the touchstones that indicate a falling away from the truth

When God's gift of grace is viewed as a LICENSE to SIN, apostasy has arrived

Yet the creepers were saying that the grace of God was so broad as to forgive anything one might do, so go for it

And we see this in the church today as some are saying we've progressed beyond old-fashioned biblical morality

How many times have you heard that the church is supposed to be all about love and acceptance?

And so some try to frame a new morality on that basis while looking down on any who dare to try to uphold a biblical standard

As we see in Titus 2:11-13, rather than viewing God's graciousness toward us as a free ticket to be as bad as we want,

Believers are to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,

And to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives,

While continually looking for and anticipating the appearing of the Lord.

Third, the creepers "deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ"

What does it mean to "deny" Christ?

Actually, there are different ways to deny Christ

- Certainly, one might deny him in response to PERSECUTION or for the sake of CONVENIENCE – Peter did this three times
- Or one might deny him by his life and CONDUCT – those who don't practice what they preach
- And one might deny him by developing false ideas about him – those SUBSTITUTING the ideas of men for God's teaching
- Or by CHALLENGING who Christ is – that he is who he and the Bible say he is or even that he ever really existed at all

Wrong ideas are creeping into the church today as academics search for the “historical Jesus” and he is reduced to the product of folklore and fable

In these descriptions we see a serious downward trend:

It starts with the absence of any real reverence for God and his Word

Progresses to a twisting of the doctrine of grace into an excuse for sin

And culminates in an open denial of the Son of God as Master and Lord worthy of obedience

Historical Examples

We need to take just a moment at this point and look at how the next section of this letter is structured

Jude is going to point out how God will not ignore the kind of behavior that the creepers are engaged in

He does so by giving us three historical examples in **verses 5 through 7**

In **verse 8** he names the specific sinful behavior for each group – in reverse order – and shows how the apostates are guilty too

And in **verses 9 through 13** he expands upon and illustrates those examples

In these verses, Jude turns to cases of corporate and individual apostasy or turning away from God’s will

He begins with the falling away within the ranks of the Children of Israel, the second case deals with sinning angels, and the third is found in the account of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah

The Children of Israel / Michael & Satan

In **verse 5** we read about the Children of Israel

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

All of the people were saved but some turned away from God and his judgment was that they not be allowed to enter the Land

This verse tells us that it’s possible for one to be saved then become guilty of unbelief and be judged of God because of it

We need to be very clear that this only speaks of destruction of the flesh and loss of reward – NOT loss of salvation

We see this truth throughout Scripture:

1 John 5:16 speaks of sin that leads to death – speaking of the physical death of the body and we aren’t told exactly what that sin is because it likely takes many forms

However, we do have the example of Ananias and Sapphira in **Acts 5** who lied to the Holy Spirit and died as a result

Then, in **1 Corinthians 11:29-30** Paul tells his readers in Corinth that weakness, sickness, and death in their midst is the result of sin

But, what was the sin of the Children of Israel?

Jude uses those who perished as an example of the *specific* sin we see listed last in **verse 8** – blaspheming the glorious ones

This means they were disrespectful and spoke out against others

God had saved them all out of the hand of Egypt but when they came into the wilderness, God began to judge them

Those who murmured and complained and rejected his leadership, refusing to enter into the land, he judged

Out of the entire multitude that left Egypt, only two men entered into the land – Joshua and Caleb

Those who perished were guilty of speaking against those who God put in positions of authority

They had been physically delivered but had never surrendered their hearts to God and so they rebelled

They spoke against those whom God put in places of authority which means they, ultimately, spoke against God himself

By way of further illustration and application let's turn our attention to **verses 9 and 10**

Where Jude describes an encounter between the archangel Michael and Satan

This account comes from a piece of apocryphal literature that must have been well known to Jude's original audience

It describes a dispute between Michael and Satan over the body of Moses – the details are obscure but the point isn't

The point Jude makes from the use of this account is that in the dispute, Michael did not say anything bad against Satan

Rather he restrained himself and left judgment of Satan up to God

Michael did this not out of fear of Satan but out of reverence for God and his creation and even in his fallen state, Satan is part of God's handiwork; created for God's glory

And Michael knew that even speaking judgment against Satan, the wrongest of God's creatures, is to speak against God

In contrast we see in **verse 10** that the creepers, those who turn away from God's truth, are not so restrained

Jude writes that they are rash of speech when silence is called for

Limited to their own senses, knowledge, and understanding they speak out freely against all they don't understand

Like animals they are controlled by their appetites and their desires –

And, while limiting themselves to mere natural knowledge they rail against supernatural truth –

And they speak out against those God has placed in authority - to their own destruction

Application

This example shows us that we need to be very careful when contending for the faith

We must contend for the faith but we need to SET LIMITS on our speech and resist speaking ill of those with whom we disagree

Those we disagree with are bearers of God's image and deserving of respect – even though they may be as wrong as can be

I mean, the archangel Michael would not even speak against Satan and which of those we contend with is worse than Satan?

What a sorrowful spectacle it is when those in the professing church attack each other in public – because to do so is to dishonor God

Fallen Angels / Cain, Balaam, & Korah

In Jude's second example, he reminds his readers of angels who sinned

Their sin was to leave their God-given position of authority

When this occurred or which specific event Jude has in mind is widely debated

There are strengths and weaknesses to all the positions and, since it's foolish to try to be more specific than Scripture – we simply need to understand Jude's reason for mentioning this event

There were angels who sinned against God who are now kept "in chains of gloomy darkness" awaiting final judgment

Jude's point is that their judgment is sure – just not yet complete

They are currently in captivity in a sort of prison awaiting the unavoidable execution of their sentence

Jude uses these fallen angels as examples of the middle sin we see in **verse 8** – they rejected God's authority

These angels were not content with the position that God had given them and so they rebelled

Again, Jude expands on this idea in **verse 11** where we read how the apostates mimic this sin

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion.

Let's take these illustrative examples in order:

We know from **Genesis 4** that Cain was essentially guilty of selfishness – of the desire to have things his own way
When his offering was rejected by God, rather than repent he allowed sin to control him so that he murdered his brother Abel

All in his desire to be considered more highly than he deserved

Balaam was guilty of being willing to say what people wanted to hear for money and for teaching the children of Israel to sin

We read about Balaam in the book of Numbers; the first time in **Numbers 21** and the second in **Numbers 31:15**

Korah and his group were the ones in **Numbers 16**, who openly challenged the right of Moses and Aaron to lead Israel

Again, Korah's rebellion refers to the sin of defying God-given authority which is essentially defiance of God

And God dealt with Korah in a very dramatic way when he caused the ground to open up and swallow him and his company

Application

The characteristics of false teachers are pride, selfishness, jealousy, greed, lust for power, and disregard for God's will

We need to be content with God's choice of authorities and SUBMIT to them.

Sodom and Gomorrah / Hidden Reefs

The account of Sodom and Gomorrah from **Genesis 18-19** is quite familiar to us

The sin of those cities became blatant and widely accepted as normal and for that, God judged them

Obviously, the sin Jude is illustrating with Sodom and Gomorrah is the sin of defilement of the flesh

He equates the behavior of the false teachers by referring to them as "hidden reefs at you love feasts"

"Love feasts" refer to the *agape* meals that the early church engaged in as a pre-cursor to celebrating the Lord's Table

Jude writes that the creepers feasted alongside the worshippers without fear of God

Like corrupt shepherds, they fed their own desires without regard for anyone else and had nothing to give anyone else

In **verses 12-13**, Jude really gets rolling with a series of metaphors that describe just how bankrupt and useless these men are

He calls them clouds that promise rain but are blown on past without delivering a drop

Trees that not only don't bear fruit but could actually be considered as uprooted from the ground because they are so unable to do so

Wild waves that crash against the shore with all kind of noise, spray and foam but really are all bluster and of no durable use

Meteors that flash across the sky but give no lasting light or point of reference before they pass into utter darkness

As inconstant men who ultimately disappoint the expectations and hopes of the church –

They defile the church even as they take care to meet their own desires and fill their own bellies

Application

Of course we need to be vigilant against sexual sins – seemingly more so every day as we look around our world

But we also need to guard against sins that defile the flesh by indulging our own appetites to the detriment of others

And we need to be sure that we always have something to offer to others

And the only way to have something to offer is if we remain rooted in the truth and contend for the faith

Take a look and you will see it is that lack of an anchor that ties each of those last four metaphors together

It's imperative that we remain ANCHORED to God's truth

Judgment

The three main examples, the children of Israel, the fallen angels, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, teach us about God's judgment

It may play out immediately as with the children of Israel

It may be delayed for a very long time as in the case of the fallen angels who are still waiting in chains

Or it may come suddenly as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah

But, in any event, God's judgment is certain

And Jude turns to the topic of ultimate judgment that will befall the false teachers in **verses 14-15**

Again, Jude turns to an apocryphal writing that was familiar to his original readers for the account of Enoch's prophecy. Enoch's prophecy deals with the Second Coming of the Lord with his saints to judge and convict the ungodly with unanswerable evidence against them.

The judgment of false teachers who sneak into the church to wreak their brand of havoc will be rendered and their judgment is just as sure as that of the three ancient examples that Jude has just recited for us

Further Description

Jude closes out this section on judgment by giving a few more descriptors of the false teachers that just might give us pause

He writes in **verse 16**:

- They are grumblers and malcontents – in other words they are complainers, and if you think about it, all complaining is ultimately complaining against God who is the source of all things
- They continually follow their own sinful desires – their notions, ambitions, ideas, and lusts are the rule of their lives
- They are loud-mouthed boasters – they exalt and magnify themselves over others, perhaps even over God
- They tend to show favoritism to gain advantage – refusing to submit to God, they cozy up to other men when they think it will get them ahead

How many of us are guilty of at least some of those things?

It kind of stings to realize that maybe we have one or more characteristics of an apostate, doesn't it?

While these last few things may seem somewhat far removed from apostasy, they are the seeds of the other sins

And who can say how those seeds might grow once we have sown them?

We would do well to recognize those behaviors and root them out before they gain any stronger hold in our lives

Apostasy Predicted

Jude now turns his attention to the positive as he comes to the end of his letter as he tells us that these false teachers aren't a surprise

They have long been predicted by the apostles

Some of those predictions are found in: **Acts 20:29**; **1 Timothy 4:1**; and **2 Timothy 4:3**

And in **verses 20-23** he gives practical advice as to how to deal with the inevitable false teachers that sneak into the church

Protect Yourself

First, Jude says that the believers need to PROTECT themselves and he outlines four steps to secure that protection

Look with me at **verses 20-21**

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Step one is to continually be learning the truth by studying your Bible

Being in and under the Word every day so that you know the truth is like taking vitamins to ward off sickness

So, STUDY the bible. READ and REFLECT on what you have read. Make connections. Learn.

Step two is to continually PRAY in the Holy Spirit

This means to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit and according to his teaching and will

It means to depend on God not only for answers to your prayers but for the prayers themselves

Step 3 is to keep yourself in the love of God

Another way to say this is to be sure that you MAINTAIN a right relationship with God

Think of God's love as sunshine that constantly shines down with the potential to warm us

It's possible for us to put up barriers to block it

Jude is saying, as one who walks in the sunshine, don't do anything to block it out

Make certain there is nothing in your life, unconfessed sin, distractions, or attractions to block the warm fellowship of God

Step 4 is to be always looking forward so as to EAGERLY ANTICIPATE the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

Jude is saying that we need to always keep our hope alive as we wait for the day of his return

Knowing that Jesus could come for us at any moment should serve to keep us sharp and spur us on

Rescue Others

Once we have taken the steps to protect ourselves we are in a position to RESCUE others

And in **verses 22 and 23** Jude turns his attention to how we can help those others

Jude mentions three classes of people who need our help and what our attitudes and behaviors toward each should be

In **verse 22** we see the first type of person

And have mercy on those who doubt;

These are those people who through weakness or ignorance are questioning and faltering but who are open to conviction

We are to answer their arguments and questions and reason with them with MEEKNESS and AFFECTION

We should be careful to demonstrate tender concern for their welfare

The second type of person is found in the first part of **verse 23**

... save others by snatching them out of the fire ...

Jude tells us that there are some who are headed for disaster who we must deal with more harshly or more expediently

We need to understand that there is a great difference between the weak and the willful

This group would likely be more willful than weak and so we will need to act with more URGENCY and FIRMNESS

The latter part of **verse 23** tells us how to deal with the final type of person

... to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

These people are the most corrupt; this group might even contain the false teachers themselves

These we must approach with FEAR and EXTREME CAUTION and be careful not to catch the disease we're trying to cure

The illustration that keeps coming to mind is medical personnel in hazmat suits when dealing with a person who is sick with a particularly infectious disease

I think that's the idea that Jude is conveying here – that we are to be very careful as we deal with these folks

But deal with them we must and notice that we are still to deal with them with compassion and mercy while taking care to not become infected ourselves

For our role is to save and not destroy – not to drive them from the church but to win them into true fellowship

We must contend for the faith but we must do so with LOVE

We must contend without being contentious

God is Able

As we come to the end of the letter there is an unexpressed question that requires an answer:

Who will deliver us from the apostates and their apostasy?

And the answer is found in **verses 24 and 25**

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

It is God and God alone who is able to keep us.

Apostasy will at some point come into the church, but God is able to PRESERVE the church.

God has the power to guard and protect us and to keep us from falling

Certainly he will keep us from falling away but he also has the ability to keep us from falling down so as to harm ourselves

And, he has the ability to present us without blemish or mark so that we might stand the scrutiny of the Judge

And not just barely but with great rejoicing

Then Jude ends his epistle in the best way possible – by ascribing for all time the highest praise and adoration possible to God

Let it be so!

Let's pray