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“. . . and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” Jude 3.

Contending for the Faith

Lesson Aim: To encourage steadfastness in the faith.

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INTRODUCTION

This lesson aims “to encourage steadfastness in the faith.” It is based upon the admonition of Jude to **“earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,”** Jude 3. It is in agreement with the admonition of Peter, **“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear,”** 1 Peter 3:15.

Jude is one of the lesser known persons of the New Testament. His name occurs only in lists of the apostles, in John 14:21-22, and in this epistle. He was the “brother of James” and so identifies himself in his epistle. James was a prominent man in Jerusalem where he was known as “the brother of the Lord Jesus.” This means that Jude was also a brother (half brother) of Jesus. This alone is sufficient to encourage earnest Christians to heed the message of this little epistle.

The purpose of the epistle of Jude is to exhort believers to contend earnestly for the faith. Certain unprincipled men had come into the churches under the guise of being true Christians and were turning weak believers into error. Such would surely work havoc to the churches and it was most imperative that this be stopped. Jude encourages believers to stand firm knowing that those reprobates were headed for the judgment of God.

There is a great need for this message today. The name “Christian” is

so loosely used there is danger that the faith may degenerate. The presence of so much false doctrine in the world challenges the Christian to watchfulness. Listen to the words of Jude as if they were addressed to you personally. They are!

EXPOSITION

I. IN THE FAITH, 1.2.

1. Sanctified.—All those who have true faith in Jesus are sanctified by God, verse 1. Such sanctification does not refer to a special quality of holiness which comes separate from salvation. It is rather the cleansing by the Spirit through which the penitent, believing sinner becomes a partaker of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4) which expresses itself in all of life.

The Greek word for sanctified is built upon the stem which means unselfish love. It means God is “unwilling to abandon or do without His child; that God takes pleasure in His own: that He prizes His children above all others.”

All this is involved in the fact that believers are “sanctified by God the Father.” Observe that the God who sanctifies is identified as “the Father” because sanctification is related to salvation. How wonderful to be one of the saints of God “sanctified by the Holy Ghost,” Romans 15:16. Believers are sanctified in the faith.

2. Preserved.—Not only is the believer “sanctified by God the Father,” he is also “preserved in Jesus Christ.” Were it not for this preservation by God's power the believer would be in constant danger of eternal destruction. Jude assures us, however, that the believer is in Jesus and He serves as a guardian. So safe are we under His care that none of those whom He has received will perish. Believers owe their preservation to Jesus. All would fall away and perish if they were not “kept by the power of God,” I Peter 1:5.

Look at the promises made to the believer. He is given eternal life as a present possession (John 3:16, 36), shall never perish (John 5:24), shall never be separated from God (Romans 8:35-39), is sealed unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30), and is kept in the hands of the Father and the Son (John 10:27-29). The term “kept” in I Peter 1:5 is the military term which pictures one under the guard and protection of soldiers who surround him to make sure he stays secure. What a reason for believers to rejoice. What an incentive to win others to Jesus.

3. Called.—Those who are Christ's have been called into faith and are kept by the Lord Jesus, verse 1. All this is connected with salvation. God

spoke to the sinner's heart in conviction of sin. He responded to the call in penitent faith. God accepted and sanctified him so that he became one of God's beloved. This calling was effectual in that it brought redemption. In the first verse of the epistle of Jude a three-fold blessing is set forth. (1) God has made believers His by calling them to partake of the gospel. (2) He has regenerated them by His Spirit unto newness of life. (3) He has preserved them by the hand of Christ and power of God so they would not fall away from salvation. This is God's wonderful grace.

4. Recipients.—Those who are in the faith have received mercy, peace, and love, verse 2. Mercy speaks of the pardon of all sin and acceptance with God. He saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, Titus 3:4-8. Love speaks of the gracious affection of God toward men, the believers toward one another, and the believers toward the unsaved. Peace is the result of justification and is experienced in the Christian's relationship to God, in his own conscience, and in the prospect of eternity.

It seems that the writer of this epistle is wishing that believers may grow into an increasing experience of the joys of salvation that these may “be multiplied.” Mercy is the unmerited source while peace and love are the blissful results. This is the present experience of all who know Jesus in forgiveness of sins. It is the experience of all who are “in the faith.”

II. FOR THE FAITH, 3-4.

1. Unity.—Men who are devoted to the Lord Jesus stand in unity to defend the faith, verse 3. They are “beloved” one to another since they share salvation in Jesus. Those who are saved are thus united in a holy brotherhood and members of the family of God.

Those who know the same Lord Jesus as Saviour, who claim the same God as Father, who study the same Bible as their rule of faith and practice, should stand together in defense of the faith. Personal differences between brethren should count as nothing when the defense of the faith is at stake. Differences in culture, education, race, etc., all fall into the background when the faith is threatened. God help believers to stand together today.

2. Effort.—The faith is defended by brethren who take a determined stand, verse 3. Jude admonishes us to “earnestly contend” for the faith. This expression is full of meaning. It is used nowhere else in the New Testament. It refers to the contestants in the Grecian athletic events where utmost effort was exerted to win the race. The word means to “agonize,” or “to put forth the utmost possible effort of the will through nerve and muscle, to overthrow

all competitors.” So the faith is to be defended when it is assaulted. It is to be fought for so long as there is strength. In this manner Christians are to take a determined stand for the truth,

The faith is worth defending. It is a once-for-all delivered faith. It is final, admitting no additions or subtractions. The Book which sets it forth is final and complete. This system of doctrines was delivered from God Himself. How tragic for Christians to handle it carelessly and permit Satan to assault it unopposed.

3. Apostates.—The faith must be defended because the enemy will destroy it if he can, verse 4. The presence of false prophets in the Christian fold should surprise no one. It has long been written that such false men would arise. Yet, because of their indirect and stealthy approach, some of the flock is led into doctrinal error. This is why the faith must be held to tenaciously.

Doctrinal error is always serious. Even slight doctrinal error is serious. Perversion of the truth will lead on to increasingly serious error. Eventually there will be a denial of the true God and Saviour. There are preachers who today deny the blood atonement of Jesus Christ, and the reality of forgiven sins through Him. They thereby deny that He is the Saviour. How can any true believer stand by and see this happen without standing up in defense of the faith? Satan would destroy the Christian faith if he could. Who is on the Lord's side?

III. AGAINST THE FAITH, 17-19.

1. Mockers.—Enemies of the faith mock those who believe, verses 17-18. “Scoffers are those who, being inebriated with a profane and impious contempt of God, rush headlong into a brutal contempt for the Divine Being, so that no fear nor reverence keeps them any longer within the limits of duty: as no dread of a future judgment exists in their hearts, so no hope of eternal life.”—John Calvin.

The man who speaks disparagingly of the Son of God and blasphemes the holy name of the Father by denying the truth of the Bible is a “mocker.” Our generation has witnessed the rise of a people who have cast off the fear of God and scoff at the doctrines of true religion. They speak of the “bloody religion” which believes in the atoning death of Jesus and the “blind, ignorant superstition” which believes the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Against these, the faith must be defended.

2. Lustful.—The enemies of the faith are motivated by ungodly lusts, verse 18. Lust applies in more areas than just morals. It is an inordinate

desire for anything. Evil teachers are marked by their passion to have pre-eminence as great religious leaders to gain the praise and esteem of men.

Conservative Christians are careful in selecting church leaders. They want a pastor and teachers who are humble, God fearing, Bible believing Christians. But many of these same people send their children to colleges where they are subject to the instruction and literature of men who reject the very doctrines they hold precious. To double the tragedy, many of these young people have not been founded in the truth of the Word and come from college practical atheists. One way to defend the faith is to instruct our children therein.

3. Divisive.—Jude identifies these enemies of the faith as “those who cause divisions.” False teachings cause discord in the church. These teachers separate themselves and all the weak believers from the truth and the true service of the Lord Jesus. Those who love Him will not follow but will heed the admonition: **“Now I beseech you, brethren, 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,”** Romans 16:17.

4. Unspiritual.—False teachers are unspiritual people, verse 19. It is no surprise if the minds of carnal men generate doctrines which are alien to the Word of God. They have not the Holy Spirit by whom alone the truth of God is understood, 1 Corinthians 2:14. It is impossible to be spiritually minded apart from His blessed influence. In the depraved nature of man there is nothing but what is gross and earthly. It remains so until renewed by the Spirit. Where He is absent there can be no true religion. To follow religious leaders who “have not the Spirit” is like the blind following the blind and Jesus tells of the tragic results of that course in Matthew 15:14.

IV. UP IN FAITH, 20-25.

1. Grow in grace.—Thank God for those believers who are consistently “building up yourselves on your most holy faith,” verse 20. With faith in Jesus as the foundation, a man grows upward in grace. Paul warns each man to take heed how he builds upon that foundation, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. There must be the qualities of gold, silver and precious stones in the believers life, but never the wood, hay and stubble of worldly living.

God has commanded believers to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” II Peter 3:18. God saved no man for himself alone but also for all those whom he could win. Those who grow in

grace will be able to fulfill this purpose. Share your good news. Don't let it stop with you.

2. Keep on praying.—The growing believer will live a life of prayer, verse 20. Each believer should find a daily glow to life because of his communion with God. But what does it mean that we should “pray in the Holy Ghost”? Robert Tuck offers this admirable explanation: “He will inspire it; but He will tone it, and limit it, and keep it in wise bounds.” A prayer life is essential to a growing spiritual life. Only those who live a life of prayer will make much contribution to the spread of the gospel and defense of the faith. The Spirit will produce a life of prayer in any person whom He governs.

3. Keep close to God.—The prospering believer will stay near to God, verse 21. To keep oneself in the love of God means to keep so close to Him that one is always conscious of His love. Paul says positively that nothing in time or eternity, material or spiritual, could separate the believer from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ the Lord, Romans 8:35-39. So the admonition here is to remain spiritually sensitive to God's love.

Love is the central theme of the gospel. It is no weak sentiment but the very nature of God which motivated the gift of His Son, John 3:16. The believer must make certain that he does not permit the deceitfulness of sin to harden his heart. To lose love would be to suffer a serious defeat in defense of the faith. To “keep” oneself in the love of God means that it is the Christian's private privilege to cultivate this grace.

4. Win others.—The faith is defended as men are won to it, verses 22-23. Jude admonishes that a determined effort be made to reclaim wayward brethren and enlist new converts. These must be saved from heresy even as a stick would be snatched from the fire to keep it from being consumed. This is one way to defend the faith. It is a most rewarding work and is a solemn obligation the Christian bears toward an erring brother. **“Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins,”** James 5:20. A most rewarding work!

5. Trust God.—Verse 24 is the most glorious passage of the epistle. Read it again very carefully. While it is true that a man is responsible to God for his actions, he does not have to keep himself saved. A believer is kept by the power of God, I Peter 1:5. God is able to keep him from falling. But not only does He preserve His own from falling, He also intends to present them faultless before the presence of His glory! Read Ephesians 5:25-27. This will be a time of exceeding great joy. **“... I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto**

him against that day,” II Timothy 1:12. This message is wonderful. Preachers should preach it; missionaries should tell it; believers should spread it. It is too good to keep to oneself. Tell someone about it today. This is one way to defend the faith.

6. Live for God.—“**To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen,**” verse 25. This is the ultimate purpose of existence. It is the purpose of our salvation, Ephesians 1:12. It is the purpose of defending the faith. It is the purpose for propagating the faith. It is the purpose in growing in grace. This is the ultimate accomplishment in living. The man whose life has honored God is a success whether the world recognizes it or not.

CONCLUSION

True New Testament Christianity is being seriously threatened today. The growth of atheism is alarming. The prevalence of liberal theology and its widespread acceptance by some Christian groups is most serious. God wants His people to stand faithfully by the principles of truth and proclaim them boldly. In the home, in the church, in all of life there must be unflinching allegiance to the doctrine of Christ and diligent effort to share it with others. Will you resolve before Him to be one of the faithful? “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,” Ephesians 6:10.

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Jude?
2. What is the purpose of his epistle?
3. How can one earnestly contend for the faith?
4. What is “the faith”?
5. “Who are “in the faith”?”
6. Why do some oppose the faith?
7. How does one “grow in grace”?
8. What does verse 24 mean to you?
9. What can you do personally to defend the faith?
10. How has this study helped you personally?