

Contend for the Faith Once Delivered

The ministry of the apostles began after Christ ascended into heaven. His ascension into heaven is described in Acts 1:11 where we are told that two angels were present when Jesus went up into the clouds. They told the disciples that He would return to earth in like manner. That means that just as He went up into heaven, He is going to come back down. They were obviously speaking of the Second Coming of Christ. From that point, the ministry of the disciples evolved. They were to go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, and then continue spreading the gospel. I doubt the twelve made it physically around the globe, but they were to present the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the world.

Jesus stated that in Acts 1:7-8.

In Acts chapter 2, we are told that they were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and Peter began to preach. 3,000 people became Christians that day. Later in Acts 4:4, we learn that 5,000 people became Christians. If

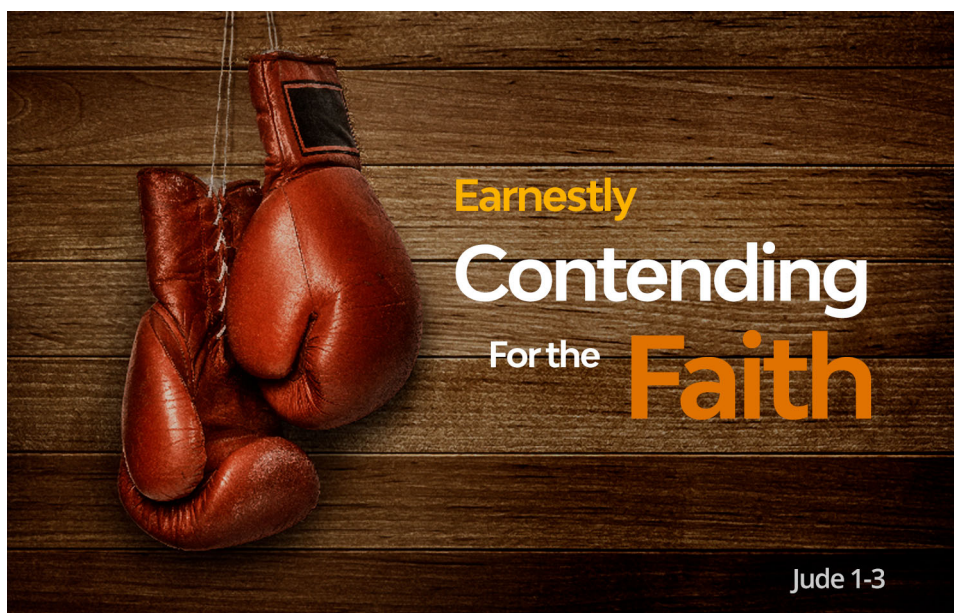
we continue reading, in Acts 6:7 we are told that many of the priests became Christians. That to me is really significant. Not only do we have 8,000 people who have become Christians, but now the priests, many of whom had rejected Christ before His crucifixion, had a change of heart—obviously a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Many of them became Christians.

We are told in Acts chapters 7 through 8 that persecution of the Christians broke out. Acts 8:1-3 is the first time we encounter the Apostle Paul (when still Saul) when he wanted

to murder Christians. We are told that the Christians fled because of the persecution that had started as a result of the martyrdom of Stephen in chapter 7. Persecution was in full swing. Obviously Satan was trying to motivate Christians to stop sharing about Jesus and so the church was being attacked. It was being attacked from outside, and soon it was going to be attacked from within the church.

The attack from within would be from false teachers. Paul had warned the Ephesians that there would be men who would come up from within the church to draw away a crowd, and they would teach perverse things. So false teachers were eventually a major issue.

If you look at Acts 15:1-5, you discover that very early in the Church there were some people that we refer to as Judaizers. These were individuals who became Christians, but still held onto the Mosaic customs. The Judaizers were telling Christians that



they needed to obey the Mosaic Law and get circumcised in order to be saved. As a result, in Acts 15 there was a council of the Church in Jerusalem. The elders, apostles, and the Church were all there. They discussed whether gentiles were included in salvation. The ultimate answer was yes; so as a result, we are here. The gospel has been presented to us, and we are believers. That was the conclusion of the council in Jerusalem. Early in the history of the Church, she was dealing with false teaching. Some people actually wanted to exclude gentiles from the

faith. So as we continue reading through the New Testament, we find that there are a number of books that address false teaching. Not all of the books address attacks from without, or attacks from within. But there are some books that clearly refute false teaching, Gnosticism or Libertinism. Libertinism is where a Christian argues that you can do whatever you want to do. You can sin, you can do anything you want to do. The sin has already been forgiven. You are free and can do whatever you want to do. Paul shot that down in the book of Colossians. Gnosticism was addressed in Colossians. In Galatians Paul refutes the Judaizers. We find that 1 and 2 Thessalonians are refuting somebody who is teaching that the Second Coming had already occurred, and they had missed it. There is no question that the early Church had some real difficulties.

We often think today that our problems are unique to our century, to our times. What we do not stop to realize is that the early Church was also fighting attacks from the outside and from the inside while trying to keep the Church on a straight course. As time goes by and the apostles are dying (some are martyred early in their ministry), we find at the end of the 1st century some apostles giving warnings about false teachers. For example, we know that the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy gives a warning about false teachers. That book was written roughly A.D. 66-67. The book of 2 Peter addresses false teaching and was written roughly A.D. 67-68.

The book of Jude is the next one in the chronology. Jude is an apostle who wrote roughly A.D. 68-70. The last one is the Apostle John. 2 John is all about false teachers. In fact in that book, John tells us not to even associate, not to even have a meal with a false teacher. Otherwise we participate in their evil deeds. This implies that we are responsible to not associate with false teachers. That epistle was written roughly A.D. 90-95. This tells us that at the end of the 1st century, the few remaining apostles are very concerned about false teaching within the churches and are giving warnings. You have the Apostles John, Paul, Peter, and Jude all addressing the issue of false teaching.

INTRODUCTION TO JUDE. As we have said, the book of Jude is about the issue of false teaching in the Church. The book, interestingly enough, has also been described as the Acts of the Apostates—not the Acts of the Apostles, but the Acts

of the Apostates. An apostate is someone in the Church but yet rejects Christ. This is not somebody who was a Christian and then stops being a Christian, which is often a definition given today. A true apostate is someone in the Church who rejects Christ. You can find them in pulpits. They may deny the virgin birth, or deny that Genesis 1 is literal. They may deny that Jesus is God who actually physically died for our sins. One pastor said Jesus did not die for our sins; He died so that we could have a positive self-image! That is totally heretical! So the book of Jude, as one person said, is the Acts of the Apostates. It answers the question, “What do the heretics do within the Church?” So Jude gives us a warning to defend the truth. If you get rid of the truth, the Word of God, there is no reason to go to church. Why go to church and give your money, sing songs, and have fellowship if there is nothing to it? If you throw away truth, what is left? Nothing more than just a good time, like the non-Christians do at a party.

So Jude is going to call us to defend the truth. The purpose and theme of Jude is to contend earnestly for the faith. If you look at verse 3, it will introduce you to the theme of the book. He says,

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith . . .

There it is. He says, “That you contend earnestly for the faith.”

. . . which was once for all handed down to the saints. Jude 1:3 (NASB)

Jude is telling us that what we need to do is to contend earnestly for the faith. Why? Because the faith is the content of truth. We call it the word of God. In Scripture the word of God is also called the word of truth. If you throw away the truth, there is nothing left. There is no reason to meet on Sunday morning if all you are going to hear is some story, some book report. What you want and need to hear is truth! So Jude tells us it is important to defend the truth.

Now why would you want to defend the truth if you are

not interested in hearing truth taught at church or in a Bible study? The point is that if truth is important, you will want to defend it. You will also want to hear it defended when it is taught. It is not good enough just to defend it in general, or in principle, but you will also want to hear it regularly taught. If it is not, church and Bible study become meaningless.

The question that we have today is what does Jude mean by contending earnestly for the faith? We are going to look at two verses before we get there, so we will begin with verse 1.

JUDE, A SLAVE OF CHRIST. Our study tonight covers Jude 1-3. I almost said Jude 1:1-3. Since there is only one chapter, we express the reference in just verses. So let us read verse 1 and get into our study.

Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, Jesus Christ. To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ . . . Jude 1 (NASB)

It is interesting that Jude calls himself a bondservant. The Greek word for “bondservant” here is actually *doulos*. The word *doulos* means “slave.” What Jude actually is saying is, “I am a slave of Jesus Christ.” Now your Bibles probably say bondservant. One publisher of Bibles was contacted and asked why did they not translate the word *doulos* as “slave,” and instead put in “bondservant.” They explained that it would be too sensitive for many Christians around the world; they would be offended by the word slave. But that is exactly what the Greek text says. It does not say bondservant. “Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ.” That is what the actual Greek text says. Jude is making the point that he is serving as a slave to Jesus Christ. Whatever Jesus Christ wants him to do, he is going to do. He does not have a choice. Now obviously he is making the decision to have that relationship. Jude picked the word and said, “I am a slave of Jesus.” That should tell us something. If that is the attitude of an apostle, should that not be our attitude as well? The answer is yes. In fact, if you were to look at the epistles in the New Testament, you would find that Paul refers to himself as a slave of Jesus. James refers to himself as a slave of Jesus. Peter refers to himself as a slave of Jesus. Jude refers to himself as a slave of Jesus. In Revelation 1:1, the Apostle John refers to every Christian as a slave of Christ.

All believers are actually slaves of Christ. It is important to understand that the apostles considered themselves to be slaves of Christ, not just servants of Christ. This is more than a bondservant relationship where I choose to punch the hole in my ear and continue to serve my master. The term bondservant loses the meaning of the word *doulos*. Jude was a slave of Christ in the time of Rome! So the apostles were slaves of Christ, and we like them are to be slaves of Christ. We should have the attitude of whatever the Master wants, we are going to do.

If you were to look at Matthew 20:27, Jesus makes the statement that,

. . . whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave . . .

Matthew 20:27 (NASB)

The point that I want to make is that if you want to be first, you have to actually be the slave of all. That is a hard thing for us to think about, because we view the idea of being a slave of anybody as demeaning. But in relationship to God, that is exactly the way we should respond. When we read something in Scripture, we should want to please Him. When we read something, we should want to do it or to respond in obedience. God tells us to do something; we want to do it. If we sense that the Holy Spirit is leading us in a way, we should want to do it. We should be the slave who responds to the Master - whatever it is He wants us to do, and we should want to do it! It is not that we are a slave because we have to be one. We are a slave because we want to be His slave.

Years ago, at the Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, J. Vernon McGee was the pastor. I was a student at what was then BIOLA College. I remember I was sitting way in the back of the church and was really struggling with the idea of being a slave of Christ. I was struggling with the idea that there were all these things that I needed to do, that God wanted me to do! I was struggling with the idea of doing all these things for Christ. As I sat there and he was preaching, all of a sudden I realized it is a heart attitude. The issue was: did I want to please my Lord as opposed to do I have to please my Lord? I just started weeping. I was weeping and weeping and weeping. I was having a hard time getting control of my tears. A dear lady in front of me, much older than I was, turned around and she

asked, “Are you okay?” I thought to myself later that she must have known I was not okay; I was a mess. The Lord finally got to me that the issue of obedience is not because I have to obey but because I want to obey.

So the apostles are saying, “We are slaves of Christ. We want to be His slave. It is our choice.” It is a heart attitude. The issue for you is: do you want to be His slave? In a sense, the word “bondservant” is appropriate, but it is not the correct translation of the Greek text. A bondservant is one who wants to remain in servitude. That was the Old Testament example. They wanted to remain a servant to their master for their life’s duration. They made this decision at the point when they could have been set free. They had their earlobe pierced to demonstrate their decision that they wanted to be the slave of their master. That should be our attitude when it comes to Christ. Here Jude says, “I am a slave of Jesus.”

JUDE, A BROTHER OF JAMES AND JESUS. I also find it interesting that in John 15:15, Jesus told the disciples that they are no longer slaves, but friends. He says, “I call you friends.” But yet, what does Jude do? He does not say, “Jude, a friend of Jesus Christ.” But he was a friend. What did he say? He said, “Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ.” Now I was beginning to realize that Jude was a humble man because he was the half-brother of Jesus Christ, but he does not mention that. Do you know what he could have done? He could have said, “Jude, a half-brother of Jesus Christ. See, look at me, I am connected to Jesus, I am a half-brother. Am I not something?! I am related to Him. I am one of His family members.” You will never see Jude mention his family relationship with Jesus in this book. It is as if it never happened. Jude is a humble man.

If you were to look at Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, you would find out that Jude is in the list of family members; but he does not mention that in this verse. Matthew and Mark use another form of the name, Judas. In Galatians 1:19, we read this. Paul is writing. He says,

But I did not see any other of the apostles . . . Galatians 1:19 (NASB)

Now listen to this.

. . . except James, the Lord’s brother. Galatians 1:19 (NASB)

But here in Jude 1, the rest of the verse says,

Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ and . . . Jude 1a (NASB)

What does he say?

. . . brother of James . . . Jude 1b (NASB)

So what does Paul do in Galatians 1:19? He says James was a brother of Jesus and what does Jude tell us in verse 1? He is a brother of James. So if James is a brother of Jesus, and Jude is a brother of James, that means that Jude is a brother of Christ. This is really a wonderful verse. Now we need to go to John 7:1-5. This is an encounter between Jesus and his brothers. We read,

After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near. Therefore His brothers said to Him, “Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.” For not even His brothers were . . . John 7:2-5 (NASB)

What does it say?

. . . believing in Him. John 7:2-5 (NASB)

John 7:1-5 tells us that Jesus’ brothers did not believe in Jesus. So what does that mean about Jude and James at this point? What does that mean about His other brothers? They do not believe in Christ. If you were to look at Acts 1, we would discover that the brothers were in the upper room along with Mary and the apostles when they were praying and waiting on the Holy Spirit to come. That means that at some point Jude became a Christian. At some point he believed in Christ. He recognized that Jesus died on a cross and came back to life, and he believed in Christ.

Now is it not interesting that he says “a servant of Jesus

Christ”? This is not a brother who is so arrogant and so proud that he cannot humble himself and submit to his own brother. That is exactly what he did. He is submitting himself to his own brother. Jude is a very humble individual. May I ask you a question? What are the signs of humility? Let me answer that for you and give you three things to think about. Humility is marked by submission. Proud people will not submit. Proud people will not yield to other people. A good example of this is in Philippians 2:6-8, where we are told that Christ humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death on a cross. That tells us that humility is an act of submission. In fact, 1 Peter is all about humility. Throughout the book, it was submit, submit, and submit. Jude is submitting himself to Christ. One of the first marks or signs of humility is that we will submit.

Another sign of humility is that we give honor to someone else. That is exactly what Jude does here. Jude is not giving honor to himself; he is giving honor to Christ—and indirectly to his brother James by the way he phrases this.

The third sign of humility is that you see your own inadequacies. Now, we cannot take this too far, because some people are so absorbed with themselves and their own inadequacies that they start feeling despondent, and they have trouble doing anything. If that actually occurs, that is not a sign of humility, that is actually a sign of pride. They cannot accept the fact that they are inadequate. Remember what Paul said? Paul said, “When I am weak, I am strong.” So true humility recognizes your own inadequacies. It depends on Christ, and then you move forward, because Paul also said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

So those are three marks of humility, and the marks are here: Jude has submitted himself. Jude has given honor to Christ. As we continue reading through this, you will see that the other mark of humility is also true of him as well. So that is Jude, a humble man.

THOSE WHO ARE CALLED. He goes on and says,

To those who are the called . . . Jude 1 (NASB)

This is also a sign of humility, believe it or not. Who are the called? It is the message that salvation is not about something that the apostles have accomplished. Paul tells us in 1 Corin-

thians 3 that our responsibility is to plant and to water. Who gives the increase? God does. So Jude says, “those who are called,” and not called by him ...

. . . beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ . . . Jude 1 (NASB)

What Jude is really stating here is that people are Christians because God the Father called them. It is the Father who by the Holy Spirit drew them to Christ. God the Father then gave them the faith. It is God the Father who justified them. It is not something that the apostles did. The apostles were responsible to plant and to water, and God gave the increase. Again, that is a sign of humility. He gives credit to whom credit is due. Then when he says “beloved in God the Father,” it is obvious that we are loved, we are cared for by God the Father. Then he says, “kept.” The word for “kept” is another really important word in this verse. The first one was “called,” and this one is “kept.” The word for “kept” is in the imperfect tense. That means something began and has ongoing effect. It is not that it just happened, but it happened and it continues. It is the idea that when you became a Christian, you are kept and you are continuing to be kept, you are never going to lose your faith.

If you want a verse that talks about the fact that once you are saved, you are saved forever, this is the verse. There are a lot of other verses, but this is one of the verses. It the idea that once you are saved, you are saved! Jesus in John 6 said multiple times that those who put their faith in Him, He will raise them up on the last day. It is repeated and repeated and repeated that He will raise us up on the last day. In verse 1 Jude communicates to us indirectly by what he says that he is a humble man. It also makes a point that salvation is of the Father: He called us. He drew us. He keeps us. Salvation is actually not something that we perform. We have a role. But in the larger sense, it is God the Father who is orchestrating it.

MERCY, PEACE AND LOVE. Verse 2 says,

May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. Jude 2 (NASB)

The word for “multiplied” has the idea of greatly increased.

The word for “mercy” is a word on which we often do not have a good handle. The Greek just means compassion given to someone who cannot help themselves. Did you know that when you became a Christian, God showed you mercy? You could not help yourself. You could not get yourself forgiven. Your salvation is not something that you brought about. It was God’s mercy that accomplished it. So Jude now wishes a blessing.

EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH. Now he is ready for verse 3. He has identified who he was and has pronounced a blessing on the readers. In verse 3 he says,

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. Jude 3 (NASB)

This is a fascinating verse for me because Jude is telling us that he wanted to write about our common salvation. What does that mean? He is saved like you are saved. We are all part of the same family. We are all family members together. He makes the point that he wanted to write about the common salvation, but he is not going to do so. He says, “I felt the necessity...” The Greek word for “necessity” has the idea of a heavy burden. You can go to 2 Corinthians 6:4, and there you find the word is translated as “hardship.” So he feels this burden that he needs to not talk about the common salvation, but about contending for the faith. Jude I states his purpose in writing his epistle is the need to contend for the faith.

This tells me a couple of things. First of all, it means the Holy Spirit is guiding him or directing him to change what he is writing about. Rather than writing about the common salvation, he is going to write about contending for the faith. He is going to change direction. When he says “contend for the faith,” the word for “contend” actually means “to engage in conflict,” or “to exert intense effort.” We have to ask the question, “What does he mean by faith?” Is this a personal faith? The answer is no. Why is it not just our personal faith in God? Because he says,

... once for all handed down to the saints. Jude 3 (NASB)

This refers to the Scriptures. What he is talking about is contending earnestly for the faith, the content of faith, the body of faith, ie the Scriptures or the Bible. He says we are to contend for the Scriptures, for the content of the faith. Now I am going to talk more about the content of faith, but let me continue and talk about this “once for all delivered down to the saints.” What that tells us about Scripture is that it (the Bible) has been delivered once for all. The Greek word is *hopox*. It is completed, it is done.

Look at 2 Peter 3:2. In this verse Peter writes,

... that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and ... 2 Peter 3:2 (NASB)

And then he says,

... the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. 2 Peter 3:2 (NASB)

In that verse Peter makes the point that what we are to be doing is to remember the words spoken by the prophets and the apostles. Who wrote the Old Testament? The prophets. Who wrote the New Testament? The apostles. Peter says we are to remember the Scriptures: the Old Testament written by the prophets and the New Testament written by the apostles. If you were to go to Ephesians 2:20, it says,

... having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone ... Ephesians 2:20 (NASB)

Paul writes in Ephesians that the foundation of the Church is the prophets and the apostles, and here Jude talks about the faith that was once for all handed down to the saints. Now, you might wonder, does he really mean the Scriptures? Yes, he does. Look at verse 17 where he says,

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand ... Jude 17 (NASB)

By who?

... by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ ... Jude 17 (NASB)

What is it that has been handed down once for all? The Scriptures: what the prophets and the apostles wrote. What is also important is that it says “once for all delivered to the saints.” There is no room for anyone to be adding to the Bible today. In other words, what Jude is telling us is that the faith was given to us once for all, back in his time by the prophets and the apostles. There is no room today for someone to say, “I am a prophet and I can write Scripture to be added to the Bible.” Jude says it is once for all delivered to the saints—done. Peter and Paul and Jude all make the point that the Scriptures were written by the prophets and the apostles; that is it.

Let us go back to the phrase, “contend earnestly for the faith.” How do we do that? That means we fight for the truth. When a critic comes along and says the Bible is not true, we need to defend the truth. One way we defend the truth is through apologetics. Another way we defend the truth is that we take on false teachers directly, we provide the biblical truth through biblical teaching. We counter the false teacher. We might do it through a sermon, or through a book. We might do it via the Internet. We take on false teaching directly, and we name who the false teachers are. In other words, we are to refute false teachers. That means we have to know the truth. Ultimately the issue always goes back to do we know the Bible? Do we know the Bible so well that we can identify

false teaching? That is really the issue. So then we appeal to truth through apologetics. We appeal to truth through textual criticism, or we appeal to truth through what the Scriptures teach. That is the way we contend for the faith. That is similar to what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:2-4, to be faithful men who teach the truth.

One of the marks of an elder is someone who is able to refute those who contradict. A true elder in a church is able to know enough about Scripture that he can actually defend the truth against those who would be contradictory, those who would be false teachers.

CONCLUSION. I want to close by reading the first stanza of the hymn, “Onward Christian Soldiers.”

Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus, going on before.
Christ the royal master leads against the foe.
Forward into battle see His banners go!
Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus, going on before.

Author: Sabine Baring-Gould

That is contending for the faith, sharing the gospel, teaching the truth, defending the truth. There is no truth if we do not defend it. Jude is telling us to contend for the faith, delivered once for all to the saints. Let us pray.

