

THE BOOK OF JUDE – THE ACTS OF THE APOSTATES

Part 2 – CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

JUDE VERSES 3-4

“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. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

As Jude was diligently preparing to write about our common salvation he said *“I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith.....”* The words, *“contend for the faith”* form the purpose for this little Book of Jude.

I inject at the beginning that contending without being contentious is a virtue, not a vice. In general, civil discourse has become so crass, so “in your face”, vociferous and insulting that some well meaning but undisciplined Christians have fallen prey to their carnal natures and verbally abuse opponents of the faith, thereby demeaning the very truths they attempt to defend. Have we forgotten that we are admonished to *“speak the truth in love”*? (Eph.4:15)

There is a delicate balance here. We must take a stand for the truth but we must remember that in fighting *“the good fight of faith”* (I Tim. 6:12) we should not violate the faith by fighting in the flesh. If, in contending for the faith some are offended, we are not to take that personally. They are not necessarily our personal enemies but are God’s enemies and *“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.*” (Heb. 10:30)

What does Jude mean by the word "contend"?

The words *“contend earnestly”* is one word in the Greek language. This word does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It is a word used in the Grecian athletic games. It means to struggle for or about anything; to put forth earnest effort; to agonize as one does who is engaged in strenuous physical effort. The reference here, of course, is only to contention by argumentation and reasoning, not by physical encounter.

Three questions:

For what are we to contend?
Why are we to contend?
How are we to contend?

FOR WHAT ARE WE TO CONTEND?

A. We are to "contend for the faith."

At this point a clarification may help some to understand that there is a difference between

how the term “*faith*” and “*the faith*” are used in Scripture. When the Bible speaks of “*faith*”, as in Mark 11:22 where Jesus said, “*Have faith in God,*” and “*Contend for the faith,*” as in Jude verse 3, the difference is this:

- “*Faith*”, as in “*Have faith in God,*” is the principle by which we comprehend and appropriate all that God is and all that God has for us.
- “*The faith*” for which we are to contend is the product of divine revelation. That is what Jude means by the words “*the faith*”? He means the whole scope of Christian truth, the comprehensive body of revealed truth which centers particularly in Christ and the gospel but is much larger than that. It means the entire body of revealed truth. There is a body of doctrine which must be preserved.

Note Some Of The Characteristics Of This Faith:

1. This faith is divine in origin.

This faith is not the product of human philosophy but of divine revelation. When my soul is burdened, when all around my soul gives way, when sorrows like sea-billows roll, when staring death in the face, when looking out into eternity, I need to find comfort, divine direction and divine answers! We have this in “*the faith*” – for it is of divine origin.

2. This faith is complete in its content.

Notice the words “*the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.*” This is the only God-authored faith that there is! There is no such thing as “continuing revelation” or “progressive revelation” beyond what we already have in the canon or volume of Holy Scripture. Cultists and unbelieving and liberal theologians believe that God’s written revelation is ongoing.

There is the doctrine, to which I certainly subscribe and to which all true biblicists subscribe, called

“*sola scriptura*” which is a Latin phrase meaning “Scripture alone.” This position accepts the 66 books of the Bible to be the complete written revelation from God and that there is no new authoritative, canonical revelation. The canon of Holy Scripture is the “*faith once for all handed down to the saints.*”

Consequently, the Scripture that we have is alone the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. If one argues that special revelations, such as dreams, visions and spectacular prophecies, have not ceased, and that such revelations are authoritative and on the level with Scripture, then one necessarily rejects sola Scriptura.

There are many who violate the doctrine of sola Scriptura in our day. Principle among them is the Roman Catholic church, some in the Charismatic Movement, cultists, etc., for example.

- The Pope claims infallibility and his pronouncements are put on equal footing with the Scriptures by the adherents of Catholicism;

- There are those Charismatic leaders who regularly make statements such as: “I had a revelation from God and He said that this is the year for revival”; or, “I received an anointing from God and He revealed to me that (such and such) is going to happen,” etc. Beware of anyone who speaks in that manner.
- The Bahá’í Faith believes in progressive or continuous revelation. It is a core teaching of Buddhism, etc. “Progressive revelation means to reveal something that is hidden, lost or needs updating. Progressive revelation is alive and well in Tibetan Buddhism.” (From the Baha’i web site.) That is the belief of many cults.
- In 2011 a man named Harold Camping declared that Judgment Day would be May 21, 2011. He said, “The Bible guarantees it.” His Family Radio Worldwide spent as much as \$3 million to broadcast this message. Camping earlier predicted the Rapture for 1994.

God is not continuing to write more Bible! God’s written revelation is complete. The Holy Scriptures will never be edited; never have an addendum to them. There will never be a 67th book in the Bible! It is, as Psalm 119:89 states: *“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”*

And, let all who would add to God’s written revelation be aware of the words at the conclusion of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ: *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”* (Rev. 22:18-21)

3. This faith has been deposited with the saints.

“contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.”

Note carefully the construction of this sentence: *“handed down to the saints”* not to “a church”! The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the sole authority in doctrine, but the Word of God alone is that. And this Word, this authority in all matters of faith and practice, was delivered to all the saints.

Therefore, we have an awesome responsibility in regard to the written Word of God. We are to know it in our heads, stow it in our hearts and show it in our lives and sow in the world! We are the protectors and we are the propagators of the faith!

"Am I A Soldier Of The Cross?"

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His Name?

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord.
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.

-Isaac Watts

WHY ARE WE TO CONTEND?

“For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

A. There are certain persons.

“For certain persons...” Jude is not writing a novel, this is not fiction. He is writing about a real and sinister threat to churches. There are persons who are bent upon division and destruction of the church. They are deviates – they have deviated from the truth and they have the devil’s agenda in mind and that is to sow the seeds of error in God’s field and the church is God’s garden. *“You are God’s field.”* (1 Cor. 3:9)

B. They have "crept in"

They shouldn't be mingling with the family of faith but they have *"crept in."* They infiltrate the fellowship and create division by their false teaching. These false teachers are outsiders who have wormed their way inside. A worm on the outside of the apple is not nearly as dangerous as a worm on the inside the apple!

C. They "crept in unnoticed."

That implies that the saints guard had been let down, a vigilant watch had not been maintained. Paul warned the church leaders of Ephesus, *“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”* (Acts 20:29-31)

He wrote to the church at Corinth, *“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.”* (1 Cor. 16:13) *"It is the common fate of the indolent to see their rights become a prey to the active. The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance; which condition if he break, servitude is at once the consequence of his crime and the punishment of his guilt."*

(So said John Philpot Curran in a speech in 1790 as quoted in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, NY, 1953, p167 and also in Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*, Boston, 1968, p479. Later Wendell Phillips, in a speech before the Massachusetts Antislavery Society in 1852 said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.")

Although these statements were spoken in a different context, nevertheless, they apply to the church as well.

AGAINST WHOM ARE WE TO CONTEND?

Who are these enemies of the cause of Christ? That the church of Jesus Christ has enemies is no surprise to most. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi this warning: *"Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things."* (Phil. 3:18,19)

These are the same sort of persons about which Jude is warning churches. They are called "apostates." The word "apostasy" comes from the Greek word "apostasia" and means "a defection, a falling away." Paul wrote to pastor Timothy as follows: *"In the latter times some shall depart from the faith."* (1 Tim. 4:1) Likewise, 2 Thess. 2:3 warns: *"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first...."* The word translated "falling away" in 2 Thess. 2:3 is "apostasia" from which we get the English word "apostate", "apostasy" and "apostatize".

A. The Classification Of An Apostate.

What is a clear definition that can be used to detect and classify a person as an apostate?

- An apostate is one who has defected and fallen away from the truth;
- An apostate is one who has made a final denial of and defection from the true biblical faith;
- An apostate is one who appears to receive and believe the Word but then falls away;
- An apostate has received light, but not life!
- An apostate deliberately rejects the truth: 2 Thessalonians 2:10 says, *"They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."*
- Judas was an apostate - so were three persons mentioned in verse 11 here in Jude: Cain, Balaam, Korah.

B. The Conduct Of An Apostate.

Are these persons only weak Christians? Are they just misunderstood? What is their status before God?

1. They are unsaved – v.4 *"not having the Spirit."* Romans 8:9 informs us *"Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."*

2. They are ungodly – That is, without God. Jude characterizes them as *"ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God^[b] and our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Jude 4)

3. They are grace perverters – v.4 (“lasciviousness”= “evil” / Liberty is license)

4. They are Christ deniers – v.4

5. They are irrational dreamers – v.8 Their teachings are imaginations, foolish fancies and groundless theories like the stuff of dreams. False doctrines are dreams, and the teachers of them are dreamers.

Jer. 23:25, 26 says of similar persons in Jeremiah’s day: *“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies?”*

C. The Corruptions Of An Apostate.

1. v. 8 - defile the flesh – like the sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah – see v. 7
2. v. 8 - reject authority
3. v. 8 - blasphemers
1. v.16 - grumblers
2. v.16 - malcontents
3. v.16 - selfish – *“following their own sinful desires”*
4. v.16 - boasters
5. v.16 - showing favoritism
6. v.18 - scoffers
7. v.18 - controlled by their ungodly passions
8. v.19 - divisive
9. v.19 - worldly

D. The Character Of An Apostate.

The true character of an apostate is seen in their emptiness, their fruitlessness cited by Jude in verses 12 and 13. Jude uses the most extraordinary, unique and descriptive figures of speech in depicting apostates that you will find in the New Testament:

1. Their perilousness.

“These are spots in your love feasts” (KJV & NKJV)

“These are they who are hidden rocks in your love-feasts....” (ASV)

“These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts....” (NASB)

The Greek word translated “spots” in some translations is “spilades” and means “a rock by or in the sea.” These apostates were like hidden rocks in the ocean and as those rocks were the cause of shipwreck to sailors, so these false teachers caused persons to make shipwreck of their faith. They were as dangerous in the church as hidden rocks are in the ocean.

2. Their emptiness.

“They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds” Instead of bringing blessings from heaven they bring the blight of hell. Instead of an enlightening influence, they are a darkening influence.

3. Their fruitlessness. *“trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots”*

“Twice dead” - dead in their fallen, natural state and dead in their ministry.

4. Their destructiveness.

“raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame”

5. Their lostness.

“wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”

We are not to get the idea that these persons wear a devil’s mask and carry a pitch-fork and wreak physical havoc wherever they are. On the exterior they look normal. They are religious – they go through all the motions, they are religious but unsaved sinners. They may be well educated, appear cordial and even sophisticated. But they are tools of the devil and their agenda is to advance the devil’s program, not God’s.

Summation

Jude writes to comfort God’s people - that’s the way he begins and ends his letter. But in the middle his emphasis is different. He is not writing to make us believers feel complacent, but to stir us to vigilance. He describes the danger that surrounds us and then tells us to fight for the faith.

Jude means that we are to preserve it, protect it and propagate the faith! We are to contend for the faith, defend the faith and extend the faith.

In other words the assured victory of the believing church does not mean that we don’t have to fight to win. It is the duty of every genuine believer to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. So God’s way, as we see it in Jude, is to give his people confidence that their faith will be victorious in the end and then to send them out to fight on behalf of it.

The Christian life is not a spectator sport. When we identify with Jesus Christ we become a target of Satan and we are engaged in a battle. I’ve said it repeatedly, the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground! There is no way of contending for the faith without fighting against error. There is a fight to be fought. Paul said, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”* (II Tim. 4:7)

Conclusion

Our hymnology encourages us to contend for the faith:

“Onward! Christian Soldiers!”

“Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus”

“Sound The Battle Cry”

“Soldiers of Christ Arise”

“Faith is The Victory”

“The Fight is On”

The hymn that capsulizes the message of Jude best is: “Faith of Our Fathers.”

“Faith of our fathers, living still,
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword;
O how our hearts beat high with joy
Whenever we hear that glorious Word!

Refrain

Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.”

Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of Jude verses 3 and 4 from *The Message Bible* read as follows:

“Dear friends, I’ve dropped everything to write you about this life of salvation that we have in common. I have to write insisting—begging!—that you fight with everything you have in you for this faith entrusted to us as a gift to guard and cherish. What has happened is that some people have infiltrated our ranks (our Scriptures warned us this would happen), who beneath their pious skin are shameless scoundrels. Their design is to replace the sheer grace of our God with sheer license—which means doing away with Jesus Christ, our one and only Master.” (Jude 3, 4)

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