

"1 Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: 2 May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. 3 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. 4 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. 5 Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Jude 1:1-7 NAS95.

The letter of Jude, just like the two letters of Peter, speak to us as contemporary voices in a wilderness of confusion and illusion about who Christ is and what biblical Christianity is.

It is of no little significance that Jude begins his letter with a description of who we are in Christ and what benefits we have because of Christ. Ask many today what it means to be a Christian and you may receive many answers. This is because there are many who follow teachers that do not know the Christ of Scripture in a personal relationship as Jude writes in vs. 19 that they are devoid of the Spirit – they do not have the Spirit at all.

It is equally significant that Jude ends his letter the way he does. From beginning to end it is a letter to encourage believers that they cannot fall away like the apostates or the false teachers. If you are in Christ it is impossible to fall away and be condemned. When someone has been saved by God's grace they will remain in that grace. How comforting that idea is.

Let me comment here about a false notion. Remaining in grace is not as loose a concept as the familiar idea of once saved/always saved. Now while it is true that if you have been saved once you will always be saved. But the notion that sustains the once saved/always saved concept is that you can live a non-maturing life in Christ and you are still eternally secure. In other words you do not have much motivation to

pursue holiness or to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ because you once professed faith in Christ so you will be saved forever. For some who hold to this idea there are two kinds of Christians: spiritual and carnal.

This is taken from a misunderstanding of 1 Cor. 3:1-2. The term “carnal Christian” is a contradiction. Paul was addressing them, the church as a whole, not as a second class of believers but was saying that their behavior in the matters of the church was reflecting worldly and infant attitudes as Christians, particularly from the presence of jealousy and quarrelling over teachers. They were walking according to men rather than by the Spirit. They were being guided by secular norms rather than being directed by the Spirit.

All believers are new creatures in Christ and are spiritual men not ungodly carnal men who are of the flesh. Yet our attitudes at times may reflect immaturity and a more worldly way than it should.

In vs. 1 he writes that we are the called, the beloved and the kept of God, very similar to 1st Peter. At the end of the letter in vs. 24 he writes,

"24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy," Jude 1:24, NAS95.

We are called by God and that proves we are God's beloved and we are kept or preserved-which means we will persevere until the end –because we are God's. He will keep us from stumbling, meaning a stumbling that would cause us to prove that we are false and He will make us to stand in the presence of His glory. He has chosen a people to bring glory to himself and He cannot fail in that purpose. God power saves us and God's power keeps us forever His. These are the bookends of the letter.

With this in mind Jude reminds them of the great benefits we have because we are God's own possession. We know His mercy, His peace and His love and Jude prays that they would be multiplied towards them, that they would know the abundance of these things. For example, God does not love you any more today than He will tomorrow or more than before you were called by Him. But as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ we not only understand God's love more, we experience more of it.

With verse 3 Jude engages us with the main point of the letter.

"3 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 1:3, NAS95.

He gives a challenge to hold firm to the faith in response to all that will challenge it in the form of false teachings.

Jude gives his reasons for writing as enthusiasm to write about the salvation we share and concern that we should stand up for the uniqueness of the faith.

This is especially appropriate today for Christians in a multi-faith society, faced with the subtle infiltrations of so-called New Age teaching and false Christianity. Jude is alarmed at the two effects of false teachers: they have made the grace of God an excuse for 'permissiveness' and they have denied the uniqueness of Christ and his salvation.

There are three points we see in verse three;

1. There is a faith once for all delivered to the saints.
2. This faith is worth contending for.

Every genuine believer should contend for the faith.

This contending is needed because the faith is repeatedly threatened from within the church. We must remember that the worse attacks concerning the faith come from within the church as he writes in vs. 4,

"4 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." Jude 1:4, NAS95.

For some this seems difficult to accept. How could such corruption come from within the church? Some churches today are so far from preaching the true gospel that it is evident they fit this description. One of the examples I used in our study of 1st Peter was the Metropolitan Church, which is a church for openly professing homosexuals to attend to practice their Christian faith.

So, how do we contend for the faith in light of these false teachers?

We must recognize point one, that there is a faith once delivered to all the saints.

The faith here implies a recognized body of teaching, such as we know emerged from Peter's early sermons and began to crystallize in such expressions as 1 Cor. 11:23-26 which explains the Lord's Supper as part of what we believe; 1 Cor. 15:3-8 teaching about the resurrection; 1 Tim. 1:15 teaching about salvation and 1 Tim. 3:16 about Christ coming in the flesh. The faith is not our act of faith but the doctrines that make up what we believe.

The idea of once for all points us to the finality of God's revelation in Christ.

Not only do we need the personal relationship with Christ to be a Christian, we need the objective truth of God's word to tell us what we believe. Doctrine that is not biblical leads to living that is not godly. That which we call orthodox doctrine has been handed down to each generation since the apostles and sometimes it needed to be reclaimed at times like the Reformation when the truth was being obscured by the traditions of men in Christian garb but who did not have a genuine relationship with Christ.

There are many doctrinal books that have been handed down thru the ages.

There is the Book of Mormon, the Koran, the Baghadvita, the writings of Confucius and Dianetics to mention some. All of these have been put forth as suitable replacements for the Bible. Modern day philosophies like Marxism, Existentialism and Transcendental Meditation have all claimed to be the truth for the ages.

However, Jude taught that the faith has been once for all delivered to the saints. God's revelation concerning the doctrinal content of our faith is finished. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20). Anyone who comes along and claims to have a new word from God to add to the faith once for all delivered to the saints is denying Scripture. There have been and continue to be those in "Christian" churches who deny the inspiration of Scripture.

We are to contend for the faith, for the doctrine we believe.

Contend implies a strenuous effort. The word is used of participants in athletic contests. It takes work to understand and effort to apply truth to our lives. Sometimes we might have to die contending for the faith. The apostles and many others have and continue to do so.

Our second point is that the truth is worth contending for. If the truth of God's Word is not accurately taught it perverts the very character of God to the hearers. His character cannot be actually perverted but how his character is understood can be perverted.

Contending for the faith is to be done by all who are called and beloved and kept for Jesus Christ. It is the duty of all believers. And yet there are those who claim to be Christians who declare doctrine divides and say "so we are not concerned about doctrine we just wasn't to preach Christ." The problem with that is, they usually cannot even proclaim the doctrine of the gospel properly and consistently pervert the character of God.

"4 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." Jude 1:4, NAS95.

In any age, those who would deny or pervert the gospel and thereby deny the Lordship of Christ have been marked out for condemnation. This is all that awaits them. As we studied in 2nd Peter, just because they are not struck dead for their lies their judgment is certain as God has ordained it and it will occur at the appointed time.

Anyone, whether using Christian as a label or no label at all who promotes that salvation by grace allows us to do whatever we please and allows for grace to be used for immorality is an ungodly person whose condemnation is sure. And yet, if we contend for the faith as we should, it may be that some of these false teachers may come to know the truth,

"22 And have mercy on some, who are doubting; 23 save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh." Jude 1:22, 23, NAS95.

There may be two or three groups of people pictured here depending on how you

read the verse or the translation: (a) those who are in two minds about the false teaching; (b) those more deeply involved with heresy, whose position is so serious that they must be snatched as from a fire); and (c) those who can only be pitied in the spirit of the fear of God which acknowledges that 'there, but for the grace of God, go I.'

We do not save anybody. Salvation is a work of God. Saving them means by the means of them hearing and seeing our contending for the faith that God will use it as the means to bring them the truth. In this way we are bringing them salvation, not saving them.

The heresy that Jude addresses can also be seen as similar to the people of Israel. They were God's in name only. He did not have their hearts. There were Old Testament prophets who taught that because they were God's people judgment would not come upon them and this led to the people sinning. Here is an example,

Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets Who lead my people astray; When they have something to bite with their teeth, They cry, "Peace," But against him who puts nothing in their mouths They declare holy war." Micah 3:5, NAS95.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke against false prophets and both were persecuted for doing so.

Just because Israel as a picture of a people of God, that could only be fulfilled in Christ's New Covenant people, were physically redeemed from Egypt did not mean that they were true believers and would not experience judgment from God.

"5 Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire." Jude 1:5-7, NAS95.

Whether rebellious Israel or angels or pagans in Sodom and Gomorrah they are examples of those who will know the judgment of eternal fire.

Status, in accordance with God's purpose means nothing. First, Israel was delivered

from Egypt, but unbelievers died in the wilderness and in the promised land as judgement. Secondly, angels have a special calling from God yet those who were disobedient met sure punishment. Thirdly, Sodom and Gomorrah (see 2 Pet. 2:6-8) were cities of the promised land, with God's servants in them, and yet they were destroyed because of the rampant immorality there.

Jude's readers knew these things but he reminds them of these things, as part of the reason to contend for the faith, just as Peter was committed to causing the believers to remember and remember and remember the things of Christ as persecution and false prophets were part of their existence.

Jude's readers, unlike many today, would not shun Jesus' own teachings through the apostles about judgment fire:

"8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire." Matthew 18:8, NAS95.

"41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;" Matthew 25:41, NAS95.

"48 where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED." Mark 9:48, NAS95.

There are some who call themselves Christians and others who believe in annihilationism.

Sinners are destroyed rather than tormented forever in "hell" or the lake of fire. It is directly related to the doctrine of conditional immortality, the idea that a human soul is not immortal unless it is given eternal life. Annihilationism asserts that God will eventually destroy or annihilate the wicked, leaving only the righteous to live on in immortality. Some annihilationists believe the wicked will be punished for their sins in the lake of fire before being annihilated, others that hell is a false doctrine of pagan origin.

Annihilationist denominations include the Seventh-day Adventists, Bible Students, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the various Advent Christian churches. Some Protestant and

Anglican writers (even such otherwise sound men like John Stott-to some degree) have also proposed annihilationist doctrines. Annihilationists base the doctrine on their exegesis of scripture, some early church writing, historical criticism of the doctrine of hell, and the concept of God as too loving to punish his creatures forever.

The foundation of the annihilationist view is based on passages that speak of the unsaved as perishing (John 3:16) or being destroyed (Matthew 10:28). Annihilationists believe that verses speaking of the second death refer to ceasing to exist.

Some Annihilationists claim that the idea of an eternal place of torment is morally repugnant and an unfair punishment for temporal sins. How can this accurately reflect God's ultimate victory over suffering and evil, they argue, when it permanently installs a place of suffering in the final, eternal order? Likewise, how can the saved live in blissful joy knowing that some of their loved ones burn forever in hell?

The Church of England's Doctrine Commission February 1995 (pg 199).. "Hell is not eternal torment." The report, entitled "The Mystery of Salvation" states, "Christians have professed appalling theologies which made God into a sadistic monster. ... Hell is not eternal torment, but it is the final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being."

One simple answer is those in heaven will not be remembering those in hell. They will be worshipping Christ.

Of course there is more to this doctrine but this is the heart of the teaching.

This view definitely perverts the character of Christ since he taught the punishment in the lake of fire. I even know Baptist pastors who teach this.

Here at verse 7 Jude ends his example of those from the past. Beginning in verse 8 he speaks of the false teachers of his day and here we will reflect for a minute on what we learned today and how we can apply this truth to our lives.

This not a definitive list or a how to manual. It is simply some things I have learned over the years.

Every believer is to contend for the faith. We should be so concerned about the character of God being misrepresented that we do all we can to make sure we do not misrepresent Jesus Christ.

How is this possible?

First, we must be serious students of the Bible. We need to understand the big picture of God's historic redemptive purpose. And that it culminates in the person of Jesus Christ.

Second, we must engage ourselves primarily, when possible, with other believers who are serious about the Scriptures and who desire to not only know the truth but live it.

Third, we need to be committed to bring the truth to others and count the cost for teaching the truth as God has given it to us not as men want to believe it.

Fourth, we must not turn example into law or let narrative story telling dictate doctrine to us. Many false teachers do this.

Fifth, we must realize that some passages of Scripture are not as easy to understand as others. Some may have the possibility of being understood in one way or another. There is only one way that is absolutely correct. However, we may not always know which it is. However, this will not occur with the fundamental truths and doctrines that we need to understand. So, be careful about being dogmatic.

Sixth, all of our study needs to be supported in prayer and trusting that the holy Spirit will teach us as we look to the promises of God for us in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes teaching sounds so good but a closer look will reveal that is really not sound doctrine. Don't judge the Word of God by the teacher. Do it comparing Scripture to Scripture. Judge the teacher by the Word of God.