

How to Contend: Look In

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[0 : 0 0] But so we're going to turn now to our reading and we are coming towards the end of our studies in the short letter of Jude. So please turn to Jude, it's the penultimate book in your Bibles.

If you don't have a Bible, we do have some at the back. If you want to grab a Bible, there are some available at the back. But I'll give you a moment to look up the letter of Jude.

And again, we'll read the letter, it's a short letter, and this is our penultimate week, looking at this together. So Jude, I'm reading from verse 1.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ, may mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

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.

[1 : 1 1] For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation. Ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God and sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.

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

And the angels, who did not stay within their own position of authority but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desires, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Yet in like manner, these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke you.

[2 : 3 1] But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. 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.

These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves. Waterless clouds swept along by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted.

Wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame. Wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

[3 : 47] These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires, as they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions, it is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

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.

And have mercy on those who doubt. Save others by snatching them out of the fire. To others, show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

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.

[5 : 13] Amen. Good. Well, please have open in front of you that short letter of Jude.

And as I mentioned, we're looking particularly at verses 20 and 21. And I, for one, am glad to be passed verses 5 to 19.

It's been hard, but necessary to hear these words. And there might be one or two of the youngsters in the room tonight. I know that Weety Y isn't on this evening.

So if you're in that category, listen out for three key words tonight. There are three key words. They're in the text. But if you can come up to me at the end of the service and tell me what those three key things are, the three key lessons in this letter for us tonight, then I have to think of some sort of prize, some sort of chocolate gift.

I can see my daughter suddenly perking up at that point. So there's chocolate on offer. But listen for the three key words in tonight's talk. Well, please have that open.

[6 : 20] Verses 20 and 21. And here's the key question. What are we to do when the gospel itself comes under threat? Jude has issued the warning loud and clear, hasn't he?

If you've been here the past few weeks, then it's been a very sobering few weeks. Jude has urged his dear brothers and sisters to see the very real danger that's right in front of them.

He's had to write to them because the gospel, the gospel once for all delivered to the saints, is under threat. There is dangerous teaching going around that perverts the grace of God into a license for sensuality.

That's verse 4. And this teaching denies Jesus' Master and Lord. And Jude's plea is please see the danger.

Please see the danger. And Jude writes to help his first readers and us to spot the danger. To spot the enemies. There are people who are the source of this dangerous teaching.

[7 : 27] And the problem is that these enemies of the gospel have slipped in unnoticed. That's the really dangerous thing. Look at the first few lines of verse 4. Certain people have crept in unnoticed.

They've not been spotted by the church. They are dangerous because they've not been identified as being dangerous. If they were clearly a danger, they would pose no threat, would they?

If they were obviously dangerous, people would stay away. But the thing is, they do not look dangerous. They look the part. These dangerous teachers look godly.

And so, in the middle, long section of this letter from verse 5 to 19, Jude is painting a very vivid set of portraits for us, seeking to identify these people they've not spotted.

He's helping us to spot the enemy of the gospel. He's helping us to see the threat and to identify the sources of the threat.

[8 : 33] And he's convinced us, I hope, of the need not only to hold to the gospel, but to defend it, to contend for it. Not just saying true things, but being willing to defend the gospel and fight for it.

But how? That's the obvious question. He set out his main plea to contend, verses 3 and 4. He's helped us see the real danger, verses 5 to 19.

But what are we to do? How are we to contend? Well, that's the very important last few verses in verse 20 to the end. Jude tells us how we are to contend for the faith.

And remember that this is a letter addressed to all the saints. This is not just a letter for church leaders. It's for all of us. That's how it begins.

Look in verse 1, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father, kept for Jesus. He's not just running to church leaders, he's running to the whole church. And so the contending he urges us to undertake is something that we all must do.

[9 : 40] It is a congregational activity, not just for the leaders, although they have particular responsibilities, of course, but it's all of us.

All of us together are to contend for the faith. And there are three main aspects, three directions, I suppose you could say, in terms of this contending.

The first is inward. And that's verses 20 and 21, which we're thinking about tonight. Here's the responsibility we have for ourselves. Second, there's an outward direction.

Verses 22 and 23. That is the responsibility we have to others. How are we to look after others and contend for the faith? And then finally, upward.

Verses 24 and 25. Look up to God, the one who will keep you until the end. So inward, outward, and upward. Those are the three directions. We'll look at the inward bit tonight.

[10 : 38] Look again at these verses. But you, verse 20, 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.

keep yourselves in the love of God.

That is Jude's key message. The other three verbs help us understand what that means. What does it mean to keep yourselves in the love of God?

Well, the three other verbs modify it. They help us see what it is to keep ourselves in the love of God. And we're to keep ourselves by doing three things.

Building, praying, and waiting. That is how we keep ourselves in the love of God. And Jude's command is positive, isn't it?

[11 : 47] He is seeking us to do something. We're not to sit back and hope for the best. No, we are to be active, playing our part in contending for the faith. But at the same time, it's not all down to us.

It does not only depend on us. Don't forget the emphasis at the start and the end of this letter. There is a keeping sandwich. If Phil was preaching, he would make a joke about eating sandwiches.

But there is a keeping sandwich in this letter. Let me read again the opening few verses and the closing few verses. And just notice that word keep or kept.

So verse 1, Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ.

And look on to the very end, verse 24. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his great glory with great joy.

[12 : 53] So do you see what the beginning and end of this letter are saying? You are kept. God is able to keep you. That is God's sovereign work in your lives.

He is keeping you. You are safe within his hands. Those are wonderful words of assurance, aren't they? They are words you must meditate on and appropriate and think on and know to be true.

If you're a Christian here tonight, you are kept by Jesus Christ for all eternity. God keeps us. But, also, in light of God's sovereign care of us, we also have a duty and a responsibility.

We must also, look at verse 21, keep ourselves in God's love. we must also actively contend. So that's Jude's keeping sandwich.

God will keep you. He will keep you. But in the middle, you must keep yourselves in the love of God. There are things we need to do. We can't just sit back and just hope for the best.

[14 : 03] That's not what Jude tells us, does he? There are things you must do to keep yourselves in the love of God. And we do that in three ways. Building, praying, and waiting.

And actually, these things are far from spectacular. I don't know about you, but if you were to sort of not read the last five verses, if you were to read the start of this letter, here, Jude's great call to contend for the faith, you see him laying out who these enemies of the gospel are, you might expect fireworks at the end in terms of how you're to contend for the faith.

But actually, what you get is far from spectacular. These things aren't difficult to grasp, they're not hard to understand, they're not especially exciting if you look at them from only a human perspective.

What Jude is urging here is the normal Christian life. And so we perhaps neglect these key aspects of the Christian life.

but Jude is reminding us these are fundamental, absolutely crucial. If we're going to contend for the faith, if we're going to secure the gospel for the next generation, these are the things we must do.

[15 : 15] And actually, it's very normal looking, very unspectacular. And when we see the magnitude of the danger, as we've seen these past weeks, then we need to listen carefully to what Jude is telling us about how we're to contend for the faith.

There's a very real danger. And it can go unnoticed. Here's what we must do. And what Jude is advocating is essentially the normal Christian life.

You must keep yourselves in the love of God. And you do that by building yourselves up, praying, and waiting. So look at those three things in turn. First, building. We keep ourselves in the love of God by building on the faith's foundations.

The key here is what we are to build ourselves up in. And the answer is the faith. We build ourselves up in the faith.

And the faith, Jude has already told us, is the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Just look back a few verses to the end of verse three. He's urging his readers to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[16 : 31] It is the body of doctrine which Christians have believed from the earliest days of the church. It is final and fixed. That is the faith you ought to build yourselves up in.

From the very earliest days, there was a recognized, defensible gospel. People knew what they're talking about when Jude says, defend the faith.

faith. Just listen to the apostle Paul in what was probably one of the earliest New Testament letters. Here's what he said in Galatians. He says to the church there, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you, let him be accursed.

As we've said before, so I say now again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. See, the basic supposition there is that there is this gospel that is known and everyone knows it.

[17 : 47] The gospel is fixed. Don't fall for other gospels. There's only one and we know what it is. The gospel is fixed and final. That is agreed upon.

It is Jude's basic assumption here, isn't it? The gospel, the faith, is known. It's fixed and final. That was the fundamental position taken by the apostle Paul from the very earliest days.

And it's this unchangeable, unchanging gospel that Jude urges those beloved Christians to build themselves up in. And it's not some sort of one-hit wonder deal.

You could infer from what Jude says here that he's meaning, you know, get yourself clear on the gospel and then you can move on to more interesting things. You can sort of deal with that and then move on, never to return to the essentials of the faith.

But it's the opposite, isn't it? Jude is saying the opposite. He's saying building yourselves up in your most holy faith. here's some grammar.

[18 : 54] It's a present participle. In other words, he doesn't say build and then go on to other things. No, building. You're always going to be doing this. You are building all the time on the once-for-all delivered to the saints faith.

You never move on from that. That is always what you're building on. You're building yourself up in that once-for-all delivered gospel. gospel. We must keep on building ourselves up in the fundamentals of the faith.

That's what Jude is saying. And we are built up as we are taught by and as we teach the gospel. When the Bible urges us to defend the gospel, it tells us to do it by teaching fearlessly.

1 Timothy 6. The Bible clearly and unashamedly taught is the first and primary way that we keep ourselves in the love of God. It is by keeping faithful to the scriptures, to the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

And it's by doing that that Jude says we're actually contending for the faith. Letting the scriptures shape every aspect of our lives, conforming every aspect of our lives to it, and not the other way around.

[20 : 11] You see, these dangerous teachers who were in amongst the church there that Jude is writing to, they were looking to do the opposite. They were looking to conform the scriptures to themselves.

They were looking to conform the scriptures to how they lived. They were turning the gospel of grace into a license for immorality. It's absolutely upside down.

You see, the faith is God's revelation to us, and so we must conform ourselves to it, not the other way around. And so we must immerse ourselves in the word, and God has graciously provided the means for doing that.

He's given us all we need, the preaching of his word, the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. Now those things are very ordinary looking, aren't they?

What we're doing at this very moment is very ordinary looking, it's unspectacular, but that is how the Lord leads us and builds us up, and we neglect those things to our detriment.

[21 : 22] We need to be constantly and consistently in God's word, and that is what Jude tells us to do first, building yourselves up in your most holy faith, and we do that by sitting under the word.

that's the first aspect of contending, and it's not spectacular in any way. It looks almost pointless, but it's actually one of God's ways of building up his church through his word, and we must constantly do it because we are on the receiving end of a vast amount of messages every single day, messages that are totally contrary to the worldview of the Bible.

Every time we pick up our phones, we are absorbing information and images, and all of those bits of information and images, they come with an agenda, and the agenda is often unseen and unacknowledged, but it seeps in.

Do you ever find this? You sort of find yourself wanting some particular thing, like how on earth did I start wanting this particular barbecue, whatever it is, and it's because you've been seeing adverts which have been targeted at you, unique to you.

You see, it seeps in. All the agendas of the world, they get into our minds. Our minds and our hearts are being molded every single day, and they're being shaped, not by the Bible, but by worldliness.

[23 : 02] And it's a very particular sort of worldview that shapes us very much, isn't it? It's the West Coast U.S. employees of big tech, most of whom are under the age of 40.

Someone was telling me this morning that most people get booted out by the time they're 40 in those big Silicon Valley companies. Those are the people that are writing the algorithms that determine what we see in our phones.

Those are the people shaping our worldviews. And so if we want to grow to maturity in Christ, if we want to build ourselves up in the once for all delivered to the saints faith, then an hour and ten minutes once a week on a Sunday morning is probably not going to do it.

An hour to unpick and unlearn what we've been learning and absorbing in the other 112 waking hours of our week. I think we're naive if we think that's going to do it.

rather we need to make the most of every opportunity to gather together if we're serious about building ourselves up in the most holy faith. So consider the key corporate gatherings of our Sunday services, our congregational prayer meeting.

[24 : 19] Those are essential to your spiritual well-being and growth. faith. But it's not just your grace. We are a body being built together aren't we?

And we have obligations and responsibility to each other. And so if I want other parts of the body to be healthy and strong, then I must see to it that I am healthy and strong myself so that I can encourage others and help them.

If I neglect my own spiritual health, then that will have an impact on my brothers and sisters. If I neglect my own spiritual health, that will affect you.

And if you neglect your own spiritual health, that will affect me and everyone else. We're all interconnected. We're a body. And that is really important, I think, to remember in our individualistic, me-centered world.

Now I imagine that most of you here this afternoon were at the morning service. And so you will know how vital it is for your own spiritual health to be out here twice on a Sunday.

[25 : 26] It's so key, isn't it? You will want others in the church to benefit as well. In the same way, it will be good for their health and for all of us.

So perhaps, I don't want to be too dogmatic on this, but perhaps you might want to have a chat with friends in the church who are morning attenders only.

If they're only ever out in the morning, have a chat and say, look, you are missing out. I need you to be here because we need to build ourselves up on our most holy faith because they are enemies of the gospel.

They may be in amongst us and we're not going to be prepared for that if we're not building ourselves up in the faith. And the way God has provided for us is the preaching of his word. it's so let's make the most of every opportunity we have.

So have a chat. If somebody you know is only out once on a Sunday or occasionally, there's no better offer, challenge them on it.

[26 : 31] We keep ourselves in the love of God by building on the faith foundations. I keep an eye too for those who are beginning to slip in their attendance.

Dick Lucas warns, the first sign that a Christian is in danger of falling away is the tendency to be a loner cut off from the sources of encouragement and nurture.

So notice, pay attention to when folk are not here, if they're away from church or they're away from their growth group. Notice the person who's normally part of your serving team but isn't there.

All being well, they'll be on holiday or something, but perhaps someone is just beginning to drift. We'll think about that more next week as we look about others. But just we have a duty to each other, don't we, just to look out and notice if people are beginning to slip away.

Because it's not just affecting them, is it? And that's an important reason enough. But everyone that slips away impacts the whole. We all lose out. It affects the health of the whole church.

[27 : 44] We've got many wonderful gifts of believers, haven't we? But one of them is each other. And so we need to meet together as God's people Sunday by Sunday, morning and evening, sitting under the word. That is how we can be building ourselves up in the most holy faith.

Well, that's the first thing, building. And it seems really normal and obvious. And it is. But what we're doing here tonight is not just a horizontal activity.

This is a supernatural activity, what is happening at this moment. It doesn't look it, but this is how God builds his church. That's the first thing, building. Second, praying. We keep ourselves in the love of God by praying in the Spirit.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is not a sort of one-way activity. activity. Yes, we listen to God and his word. We've thought about that. We are built up in the faith as we do that, but we are to respond to that revelation in prayer.

Prayer is a very real demonstration of our reliance on God in the spiritual battles we will face. In fact, it's more than a mere demonstration. It is actual dependence on God.

[28 : 56] Every time we pray, we are depending on him and relying upon him. contending for the faith will look like believers on their knees individually and corporately.

And the sort of prayer that Jude is urging here, notice what he says, praying in the Holy Spirit. That's the only sort of prayer there is.

In contrast to the false teachers who are devoid of the Spirit, look at verse 19, that's how Jude describes these people, they are devoid of the Spirit.

In contrast to them, Jude urges his Christian brothers and sisters to pray in the Spirit. Every believer has received the Holy Spirit and it's the Spirit who prompts us to pray and enables us to pray.

So this isn't a special kind of prayer that Jude is urging. It's the only kind of prayer that's ever possible. we can only ever pray in the Holy Spirit. That's the only way we can pray.

[30 : 04] And the content of the prayer he urges, given the context of the letter, will be prayer consumed with the proclamation of the one true faith, the faith once delivered to the saints.

It is a prayer for discernment, so that false gospels and false teachers will be exposed. For the new Christian, it will be a prayer that they would put down solid roots in the truth and not be swayed and taken away by these dangerous people.

For church leaders, this sort of prayer will be that they stand firm in the faith and be courageous to stand up and to call out false teachers. A prayer that church leaders would protect the flock.

It will be prayers for the husbands and fathers in the church that they would lead their families with discernment and with an absolute priority to build their family life around the church and around God's word.

It will be prayers for those who have perhaps fallen away or been sucked in by false teachers. It will be prayers that they will return to the one true faith.

[31 : 18] That will be the content of the sort of prayers that Jude is urging here. prayers that echo Paul's words at the end of Ephesians 6 where he talks about prayer as the ultimate weapon in spiritual warfare.

Listen to what Paul writes here. He says, in all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints and also for me that the words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.

the sort of prayer Paul's urging there is a prayer for the continued proclamation of the word because Paul knows that is what will build the church.

So we keep ourselves in the love of God by building in the one faith and by praying, praying in the spirit. And lastly, we build, we pray, and we wait.

[32 : 44] That's the final thing, we are waiting. We keep ourselves in the love of God by waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. That's the end of verse 21.

Now this is a really helpful and perhaps surprising final imperative. I don't know if you found it surprising but it is so key.

We need to be reminded that we are straining forward toward a goal. And the goal is not going to be realized in this present and passing world. We await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is only on that day that we will experience and enjoy the fullness of his mercy as we receive our full salvation. We live in resurrected bodies and live in the new creation.

There awaits for us a glorious consummation greater than all our imagining and almost beyond belief in which the inconsolable ache as C.S.

[33 : 51] Lewis describes it. That inconsolable ache only then will we find what we long for. The homesickness of our souls.

Only then will at last be satisfied. But we're not there yet. We cannot expect to enjoy the blessings of the new creation today.

And so to be reminded that we must wait that so helpfully gives us the right expectations for life in this world. In Romans 8 the Apostle Paul writes we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of child birth until now.

And not only the creation but we ourselves. We have the first fruits of the spirit. We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption of sons the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes what he sees but if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience.

[35 : 04] see God's promises are still waiting for their final fulfillment and Christians pin their destiny on the future rather than on the present.

And be in no doubt that the spiritual battles against the forces of darkness against these people who may invade the church be in no doubt that the outcome of those battles is assured.

Christ will reign victorious in the end and we will reign with him forever. That is assured. That is where we're headed. Whatever pressures and discourages we may face we can be fully confident that Christ will build his church.

That is where we're going. And so we would do well to discipline ourselves to take the long view. and that is hard to do in a world of instant gratification.

We can order almost any product we can think of and I'll be on our doorstep the next day. And that thinking, that sort of instant gratification that can spill over into church life and spiritual life.

[36 : 19] We perhaps expect instant results. But actually God's time scales are not ours. and contending for the faith may well be a long process.

We must learn to wait, says Jude. So don't be overly discouraged with contending for the faith. Don't overly panic at the skirmishes we must endure.

Don't worry about the battles and fights we may perhaps lose. The overall outcome of the war is never in doubt. Remember that. Wait with steady perseverance for that great day.

That is Jude's surprising but realistic reminder to us. We must wait. It may be a very long time, but we've got to keep our eyes on the end goal, where we're going.

That reality will keep us going in the present. When things are difficult, when there's real battles to face in the church, remembering where we're going, that's going to help us. But this waiting that he urges here at the end of verse 21, it doesn't mean doing nothing.

[37 : 32] It's an active waiting. It's not like waiting for a train at the station that's delayed, twiddling your thumbs. This is an active waiting, a waiting that involves building and praying.

This waiting involves contending. And so we keep ourselves in the love of God. We contend by doing these three things, by building, by praying and waiting.

What he's essentially urging us to do is the normal Christian life. It is the normal life of faithfulness to God. That is what Jude is urging.

Not spectacular, no fireworks, just normal plodding along in the Christian life. Let me close with words from James Philip on these verses.

To keep ourselves, he says, to keep ourselves in the love of God is therefore not a question of feelings or emotion, but of obedience. It is in our power, whatever crisis may come upon the world, to be constantly in the love of God, if only we will obey his voice.

[38 : 43] Obedience is not only the touch zone of all progress in the Christian life, it is our only safe course. All other ways lead to disaster.

So how do we keep ourselves in the love of God? How do we contend? Well, it's normal obedience to the Lord. We do it by building, by praying, and by waiting.

Let me pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father God, help us to be a people that live in obedience to your words, and that we would trust what you have commanded.

These words in the earlier parts of Jude, they shake us, they may cause us to anxiety. But Lord, help us to trust your plans and purposes, your methods of contending for the faith.

So help us to together build ourselves up to pray in the Holy Spirit and to wait for our eternal salvation in Christ.

[40 : 03] Help us to do that together. Help us to be a people that live by faith and not just by sight. We ask it for the name of Jesus Christ and his glory. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.