

4. Looking In, Out, Up

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[0 : 00] Well, a very good afternoon to you all, if I can jump into your conversations and get us underway. A very warm welcome to you for our Wednesday lunchtime service. It's great to see you for our final installment in Jude's letter.

So do turn with me to the letter of Jude, tucked away there just before Revelation. And you'll find it on page 1027 in the blue hardback Bible.

So do turn with me to Jude. And we'll be thinking about the last five verses of Jude's letter, verses 20 to 25. But I'll read the first four verses as well of Jude's letter just to get ourselves into it.

And then I'll read the last five. So reading from verse one. Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation.

[1 : 13] I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation.

ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only master and Lord Jesus Christ. Now look on to verse 20.

But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith. Pray 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.

[2 : 27] To the only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever.

Amen. Before we jump in to consider these verses, let's pray together, shall we? Let's pray to our Father. Amen.

Amen. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord, he is God.

It is he who made us and we are his. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him. Bless his name. For the Lord is good. His steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations.

[3 : 38] Thank you, our heavenly Father, that you are the Lord, the everlasting creator God. You are good and your steadfast love endures forever.

Father, may your name be praised and honoured in every nation, in every language, in every city. Father, we do long for your kingdom to come.

And we pray that you might keep us for that great day when every man, every woman, every child will bow the knee as they come to the Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns at your right hand.

We thank you, Father, for your continued daily provision for us and ask you would give us all we need for today.

We thank you, Father, that you have made available to us through the saving death of your son, mercy and grace leading to eternal life.

[4 : 42] And we do ask with great confidence that you would forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. We thank you, Father, for your keeping power.

And we ask that you lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. And we thank you for your precious word. Would you make us know your ways, Father?

Would you teach us your paths? Would you lead us in your truth? Would you teach us? Would you teach us? Because you are the God of our salvation.

Help us now as we turn to your words. Help us to understand, to apply it to our lives. And we ask this for your glory. And we ask it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. So do turn with me to the letter of Jude. Do have it open in front of you. We'll think about these last five verses.

[5 : 55] So I want to take you back, as we begin, to the 1950s. Some of you will have to think way back in your memories. Some of us weren't around.

Let me take you back to the 1950s. And to the United States, where McCarthyism was rife. There was real fear about communist influences in the United States.

And a witch hunt led by Senator McCarthy sought to weed out anyone with the slightest tie to communism.

And often they did it on the very flimsiest of evidence. Now, McCarthyism is a term that has come to mean the practice of making accusations of treason without proper regard for the evidence.

Making accusations without regard for evidence. Why do I mention this at the start? I'm not trying to make a political point. But we may have come to think, given the first two-thirds of Jude's letter, that without reading these final verses, we may have come to the conclusion that Jude is calling us to make some sort of McCarthyist response, as he makes his plea for us to contend for the faith.

[7 : 19] We might be thinking that he's calling us to root out anyone that looks like a heretic. But as we'll see, that is not the way we are to go about contending for the faith.

So then, how are we to go about contending for the faith? That has been the question that's been bubbling away at the back of our minds as we've been considering Jude's central plea to contend for the faith.

The stakes are high. The future of our churches hang in the balance as false teaching gains influence. These men that Jude writes about, these false teachers, change the grace of God into a license for immorality.

They might say things like, you know, surely God would not make someone in this way and then deny them a relationship in line with the way that he has made them, would he? That's the kind of thing they say.

And what are we to do in the face of such teaching? How are we to contend? But Jude didn't jump to the how-to question straight away.

[8 : 35] As we saw in the last two weeks, he spends the big central chunk of the letter going into real detail about these false teachers. We were urged to do two things.

Jude wants us to remember that Jesus is judge. And he wants us to learn to recognize the danger signs. And the danger signs, as we considered last week, are that these false teachers have a different authority.

They produce a different fruit. And they will meet a different end. Jude spends lots of time in the letter exposing these people for who they really are.

And he does it because, in verse 4, we see that these people have crept in unnoticed. So, as we come to these final verses, we're not reaching some sort of footnote to the letter.

We are reaching the real climax to all Jude has been saying. Here, he gets to the very heart of how we are to go about contending, fighting for the faith.

[9 : 51] And Jude's approach is gracious. And he points us in three different directions in these final verses. He points us in. He points us out.

And he points us up. So, we're going to look in these three directions this afternoon. We're going to look in, firstly, and see the need to build a solid foundation.

Just cast your eyes over verses 20 and 21. Jude begins by dealing with what it looks like for us Christians to contend for things he instructs them and us to do.

And they are building, praying, keeping, and waiting. So, we are to be building ourselves up, Jude says, firstly. If we're to contend for the gospel, if we're to defend it, then we must be building ourselves up in it.

The image here is of the church, as in the people, as a building. The pictures of a building being built up, growing as Christians, and growing more closely together as Christians, are duties which the New Testament writers frequently compare to the picture of a building site.

[11 : 09] Effort is required. Build yourselves up, says Jude. But in what are we to be building ourselves up in?

Well, Jude tells us, there in verse 20, Build yourselves up in your most holy faith. It's the faith. And Jude has already mentioned that right at the start of the letter, back in verse 3.

It's the faith that is fully and finally revealed in the Bible. Build yourselves up in that, says Jude. And my old minister from back home, he says that you build yourselves up by studying the Bible, by believing the Bible, and by obeying the Bible.

We can't stop at studying. We can't stop at believing. It must lead to obedience. That's how we build ourselves up in the most holy faith.

Now, this is to be done individually, yes. But really, Jude is addressing us as a group of believers, a congregation. Building up takes place in the context of your church, as you sit under God's words Sunday by Sunday, as you rub shoulders with each other before and after the services.

[12 : 36] Maybe it's in small groups during the week. Is this what happens in your church week by week? Are you sitting under the authority of the Bible?

Or is it some other authority? You and I need to be spiritually plugged in to the life of the church to ensure that we are growing up in the faith, being built up, and building others up as we go about it. Don't be a spiritual loner, out on your own. Keep meeting together. Build yourselves up, says Jude. Next, he tells us to be praying in the Holy Spirit.

He urges us to pray. It sounds so simple. And it is simple. He simply tells us to pray. How are we to do it? Well, Jude tells us we're to do it in the Holy Spirit, which perhaps sounds a little mystical, but it isn't at all.

Praying in the Holy Spirit is the only way a Christian can ever pray. To be a Christian is to have the Spirit.

[13 : 54] And that is an absolute stark contrast to the false teachers. Look at verse 19, where he describes the false teachers of people who are devoid of the Spirit.

Every time a Christian speaks to the Heavenly Father, they do so in the Holy Spirit. None of us prays without the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

So, as you pray, you might pray something like this, as I do. Lord, I feel utterly unable to fight for the gospel.

I'm weak. I lack courage. And particularly as I look around my fellow believers at church, they're as weak as I am.

But you are strong and able. Please keep giving me the strength to keep going, to keep obeying, to keep contending for the gospel.

[14 : 56] We're to pray. Pray in the Holy Spirit. That is crucial as we contend. Next, Jude tells us to keep yourselves in the love of God.

Now, this is the other side to the coin that Jude has already mentioned, back there in verse 1, where he tells us that we are kept for Jesus Christ.

There, Jude reassures us of all that God has done for the Christian, and is doing. He keeps us. But here we see the other side of the coin.

We see our responsibility. Keep yourselves in the love of God. Yes, God keeps us. We are safe in his hands, but we are to keep ourselves in his love.

We have that responsibility. But how do we do that? How do we go about keeping ourselves? Well, Jesus tells us in John 15, that if we keep his commandments, we abide in his love.

[16 : 05] If you keep his commandments, obedience is key. We are to obey our heavenly Father. And as we do so, we keep ourselves in his love.

And that is completely opposite to our modern-day false teachers, isn't it, who promote, in reality, disobedience.

So take the area of sexual immorality. They might say it's okay to sleep with someone even though you're not married, or to sleep with someone of the same gender. But this clearly flies in the face of what the Bible teaches.

Obedience in such areas does matter. Are the church leaders you follow and sit under taking a biblical approach to these issues?

Obedience is key as we keep ourselves in the love of God. And then finally, as we look into ourselves, he tells us to build up, to be praying, to keep ourselves in his love.

[17 : 11] And then finally, we are to be waiting for the mercy of Jesus Christ. Now, I don't know about you, but I don't like waiting for things.

I need to work on my patience. If I decide to do something, I want to do it right now. If I want a new computer, I want it right away. I don't want to have to wait. I want to do it straight away.

Enjoyment, I want it now. And the sort of false teachers that Jude is talking about will urge you to live for the now. Pleasure now.

They promise heaven now. Now, yes, God does give us good gifts to enjoy now. Don't misunderstand me.

But Jude wants us to remember that biblical faith is a faith that is primarily fixed on the future. We live in hope.

[18 : 10] We look forward in hope. That is where Jude wants us to fix our gaze as he speaks about the mercy of Jesus. Mercy is something to be experienced fully in the future.

It leads, where? To eternal life. As Christians living now, the best is yet to come.

We have not yet entered the new heaven. And it is a salvation that we will have fully when he returns. So we are to wait. We are to be patient. So why does Jude focus his attention on looking in firstly?

He is calling us to build ourselves up. Why does he do it? Well, contending for the faith must have its roots in the firm concrete of building, of praying, of keeping, of waiting.

Jude knows that without this, we won't be able to withstand the undermining of the gospel from false teachers. We've got to be doing these things, building, praying, keeping, and waiting.

[19 : 25] So look in, says Jude. Next, Jude wants to turn our attention outwards. He's called us to look in, and now he's asking us to look out, to show compassion on the fallen.

There in verses 22 and 23. As we turn to these people, we might be feeling a bit geed up. Let's give them what they deserve.

They've been sucked in by these false teachings. But that is not Jude's attitude at all. He says we are to show mercy. And we are told to show in different ways, depending on how influenced people are by these false teachers.

So the first group he mentions are, in verse 22, those who doubt. Have mercy on those who doubt.

So friends of yours who are perhaps a bit unsure about what to believe, they're doubting.

Maybe they are intrigued by what these false teachers are saying and doing. Perhaps they think, might these guys be onto something? Have they got something right that I've missed?

[20 : 41] They begin to doubt the teaching they've heard all their lives. We are to show mercy to that friend who is starting to doubt. As you as a church begin the costly, unpopular work of contending for the gospel.

We're not to condemn them. We're not to be hard-handed. Spend time with your friends. Feel their real, genuine questions.

Talk through why the once-for-all delivered to the saints' faith is the only faith. Gently point them to the truth. If we are so driven to achieve theological purity that people are just unable to raise legitimate questions, then something's quite wrong.

We are to show mercy to those who are doubting. Then there's another group. If you look on with me at verse 23, save others by snatching them out of the fire.

So, this is another group that's traveled a bit further down the road, following the teaching from the false teachers. These people are more than just doubters. They have dipped their toes firmly into the pool of the false teachers' sensuality and sinful living.

[22 : 03] For such people, Jude tells us to save them by snatching them out of the fire. So, perhaps when you get home this afternoon, you might need to make a phone call to that friend of yours who's fallen into the fire.

And as you do that, you'll need to risk getting your fingers burnt. It may be that you're only here today because a friend has dragged you along.

Because they're worried that you're slipping away. Be thankful to that friend. So, we are to pluck people out of the fire, not condemn them.

Show mercy. And Jude's final group are people who are clearly up to their necks with the false doctrine and living of these people. He says to others, show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

It would be very tempting to think that these people are really beyond the pale. They've completely abandoned the faith. Let them go, we might think. Just lead them to it.

[23 : 13] But no, we're still to show mercy. But Jude is careful to add something. He says, mercy mixed with fear. Fear of what?

Well, the following sentence helps us. It shows us to have a godly hatred of sin. He says, we are to hate even the garment stained by the flesh.

We are to be crystal clear as we get alongside such folk that they've got themselves into a mess. what they're doing is unacceptable and it is in reality a rejection of the lordship of Jesus and a denial of the grace of God.

Be very careful when dealing with these people that you don't get sucked in as well. Jude is utterly realistic, isn't he? this sort of thing is going to happen and it will happen to people that you know. It may even happen to you. As the church you're part of sticks its head above the parapet and fights for and contends for the gospel.

[24 : 24] These things will happen. Don't be surprised. But you are to show compassion and mercy to those who fall under the influence of such teaching. Snatch them out of the fire says Jude.

The worst thing we can do is sit back and do nothing. So we've looked in and we've looked out. Finally Jude directs our attention to God. He calls us to look up to the only God who is able and then in the great climax to the letter.

He ends with words that are really familiar to us. Verses 24 and 25. We often hear them read at the end of a church service for example. But let's forget our familiarity for just a moment and notice what Jude is saying.

He points us to our great Father in heaven and says that he is able he is able to do two great wonderful reassuring things for the Christian believer.

[25 : 56] He is able to keep you from stumbling says Jude firstly. We are reassured that as we undertake our responsibilities we can be sure that God is sovereign and in control.

He is able to keep us from stumbling as we look in and build ourselves up. He is able to keep us from stumbling as we look out and show compassion on those who doubt.

His keeping us goes hand in hand with our undertaking of our responsibilities. We are not to see this reassurance as a call to do nothing.

Not at all. He keeps us as we work out our faith. He will not let us go. And we can echo the psalmist words can't we that he will not let your foot be moved.

He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. He is able to keep you from stumbling.

[27 : 02] And then we see that he is able to present you blameless there in verse 24. Present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

Jude has talked a lot in his letter about judgment about condemnation but here he provides great assurance for the Christian that on that great day of judgment for those who abide in Christ they can stand before the judge blameless.

And it's not because of anything that we do or can do but it's because we have a saviour in Jesus Christ who died in our place for our sin.

He is able to present you blameless on that great day. That is Jude's great horizon in this letter. So it is in this context of being kept with sure hope of salvation on that great day that Jude urges us to contend for the faith by looking in by looking out and looking up.

What great reassurance we have in our God who is able and that must lead us to praise. So let me read the final verses of Jude's letter as we conclude our service.

[28 : 37] 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 saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forever.

Amen.