

Contending for the Faith

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[0 : 00] Praying to start and then we'll read the Bible and hear from that. But before we do, just one short announcement. Something that's close to many of your hearts, I know, is the quality of the sound in this room. And as my mic turning the microphone on just now has demonstrated, it makes a big difference to how well you can hear me. We've been raising an offering over the last few weeks to contribute to that and the sound through the rest of our buildings so that we can hear well and see well in all our services. And you'll be glad to hear that we've managed to raise over £25,000 towards that. That's a good proportion of the cost. These things are expensive, but hopefully this system we now have will last us for many years to come, as the last one did, more than a decade, and make a big difference to how everyone can hear. So your thanks to your part in that, your prayers for that, and to God for his goodness to us. But let's pray now and carry on with the service. Lord God, to you belongs all glory, all majesty, all dominion, and all authority.

And we owe everything to you. You are the God who is able to strengthen and encourage us to struggle for our faith, for the love you have shown us in Jesus Christ.

And as we come today, many of us weary, many of us discouraged, we pray that you will strengthen us, lift us up, and help us to be strong and glad in the faith you have given us. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.

Amen. Now this is the last of our short series of sermons on the letter of Jude. We're going to read verses 19 to 25 today.

Now you'll find that on page 1027 of your Bibles. It's the second last letter in the New Testament. Very short little one, but very full.

[2 : 13] Page 1027. And I'll start reading at verse 17, just at the heading.

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, build yourselves up in the 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.

[3 : 29] To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever.

Amen. Now as this little book has been clear and I hope we have realized from the last couple of weeks.

There are many forces arrayed against the faith once for all delivered to the saints. If we are Christians, we are in a great battle, one that has raged through the centuries.

And in some ways we are attacked from without, but far more important that we are attacked from within. And because that is true, we cannot be passive in that great struggle.

So today we make a choice to stand, to contend for that faith. The faith once for all delivered to the saints and handed down now to us.

[4 : 32] We've been looking at this letter for three weeks and you remember in verse 3, Jude says that he's writing it to remind people to contend for the faith.

In other words, they have to fight. They have to struggle. Because in his day, much like in ours, there were those in the churches and in that church who had abandoned the teaching of the Bible.

Particularly they had abandoned its teaching about how to live. Just as in our day there are many who will say that parts of the Bible are outmoded, perhaps its ethics, its way of life, that they're primitive, better forgotten, that we might hang on to the parts of the Bible that we know are more up to date, but those bits we will leave out.

Now last week we saw a very serious section in which we saw the terrible judgment coming for those who promote such things.

But today we see how we ourselves are to play a role in contending for that faith. What we are to do about all of this. How first of all we are to stand together in the love of God.

[5 : 39] Secondly, how we are to rescue those who are tempted by this dangerous teaching. And finally, how we are to do all of that with confidence in a God who can and will rescue us.

Now before we go on, just a word to you if you are not a Christian or not sure about whether you are a Christian. These are serious black and white things we're talking about.

But see as we talk, there is a great struggle at work here. A struggle between good and evil. A struggle between a God of love who cares for us and who will keep us if we come to him.

And then on the other hand, our own worst inclinations which left to themselves will destroy us. And will leave us to be judged for what we've become.

We, each of us, needs to consider which side we will be on in that great struggle. Now, firstly, I want to look at verses 20 to 21.

[6 : 39] They tell us how to stand together in the love of God. This is the first thing Jude has to tell us about how to stand and contend for the faith.

He doesn't first tell us what we need to do for other people. He doesn't tell us what we should think about other people. He tells us what we need to do about ourselves. It's very much like one of those safety announcements you get on a plane.

You know, if you're going to crash and the oxygen masks pop down. And do whatever it is they're supposed to do to save you in a crash. If you're with a child, make sure you put your own mask on first.

Because someone who has just passed out cannot put a mask on a child. You need to sort your own mask out first. You need to make sure you are able to help others.

And that is the picture here. You must make sure you're able to help other people. If you are careless, in other words, about your own spiritual health, then how are we going to help other people when they are struggling with theirs?

[7 : 47] Now, verse 20 to 21, look at first sight like four commands, don't they? To build yourself up in the faith. To pray in the spirit. To keep yourself in the love of God. And then to wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ.

But if you look a little bit closer, you see there's really one command. And it's this. Keep yourselves in the love of God. The others are the way we do that.

So let me read it again with just a couple of words added to make the emphasis of the passage clear. But you, beloved, by building yourselves up in the most holy faith, and by praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God.

As you are waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. This is the same as the command Jesus gave. To keep yourself in the love of God.

That was one of his last words to his disciple. That as he had loved them, so they were to keep themselves in his love. You see, if we are his, if we are Christians, he does love us.

[8 : 57] We are the people he died for. We are what Jude calls in verse 1, the beloved in God the Father, kept for Jesus Christ. And if we stay with him in that love, there is absolutely nothing that can sweep us away.

We'll see that again reiterated in our last section. We are safe in him. So, then our task is a simple one. It is to keep ourselves in that love. By building each other up, by praying together, and by looking forward to his coming back together.

So, of those of three. Firstly, building yourselves up in the most holy faith. You see that at the beginning of verse 20.

Christians must be people who aim to grow all the time together. We want to understand our faith, to know it more deeply, to love it more deeply year on year.

And this is a command to the whole church, not just to individuals. It's a command to be encouraging those around us. Pushing each other on, particularly when it's hard. Helping one

another, day by day and year by year, to go on further.

[10:10] Building each other up in the holy faith he's given us. The trouble is that if we just take our faith for granted, and it is easy to do that. Just to make it the faith of a spectator and nothing else.

Then it becomes very stagnant and very dull. We stop being excited about it at all. And then if we do that, when crises come, it's very easy for us to be swept away.

And very, very easy for us to become people who really struggle to help others who are in crisis. But if we do this, if we are constantly building each other up in the faith, we're ready for the challenges that faith us.

My wife has just completed her first half marathon. Now, when she was done, she was tired. But the funny thing was, she wasn't half as tired as she was before her first long run for her first training session.

Week after week, she's been building herself up in her strength. So that when the final day came, the real race, it was tough. But she could run it confidently, knowing she could do it already.

[11:21] That's what we are to do here. Building ourselves up day by day in the faith. Secondly, we have here praying in the Holy Spirit.

Because Jude wants to remind us that this isn't something we can do on our own. We need God. And of course, most of us are pretty aware, if we're Christians, how weak and inadequate and dry our prayers are.

How they lack feeling and love and passion and faith. And I've quoted this before in another place. But John Calvin, writing about these words, about the reason Jude says that we must pray in the Holy Spirit, says this.

Such is the coldness of our makeup that no one can pray rightly unless he is prompted by the Spirit of God. The reality is that all our care for others in prayer, all our enthusiasm, all our strength, all our confidence in coming to God, comes from God's own Spirit.

And so we rely completely on the Spirit to help us in prayer. So when we pray, we come, we pray in his power, and he prays with us as we pray.

[12:36] Prayer itself, not just the answers we get, prayer itself is supernatural. And we need that. So I hope that you, as a Christian, if you are a Christian, are praying, praying by yourself daily, but also very much praying with other people, whether that's in prayer meetings, in house groups, in prayer groups.

We need to pray together. And it's easy to lose perspective on that, to think of it as a trivial little thing. But no, as we do it, we are contending for the faith. Our prayers might seem small and futile and empty, but that is where the war is fought.

We are called to fight it in that way. Then, thirdly, we're also to keep ourselves in the love of God by waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, I very much suspect, is where the false teachers of Jude have gone wrong. If our focus is firstly on this life, on getting the bucket list ticked off, on the places you want to go before you die, then, if that's our focus, we are not focused on contending for the faith.

We are not focused on Jesus Christ. And when teachers come along who say, you can have it all now, we will forget that we have a far bigger all that we will have and are promised in the future.

[14:09] If we long for him to return, if we look to his mercy, then we will depend on the love of God. We will keep ourselves in the love of God because all our hope is wrapped up in it.

And we will keep our eyes on the prize. So in these three simple ways, we are to contend for our faith. They're not grand, are they? They're not world-changing at first glance.

They're not things that are going to turn our country around immediately. But bit by bit and person by person and church by church, they make the difference that strengthens our church both to withstand teaching that could destroy it and then to spread the good gospel that that teaching denies.

That is how the church is strong. That is how we are strong. That is how we contend for the faith. But secondly, of course, we do have to look out for others as well.

We need to rescue those who are tempted by this teaching because it is tempting. So if you look on to 22 and 23, you'll see that Jude is telling the people in that church that they must fight, contend, to bring back those who are being swept away by this dangerous teaching.

[15:28] And he tells them how to go about this, the manner they're to go about it in. There are a lot of possible ways you could do this. And if you go on the internet, you'll find some of them.

Some people are merely content to live and let live. But then on the other hand, there's the other end of the spectrum where we might hate or despise those who teach things that are wrong. Where we despise them. That's depressingly common. Or shun them. You know, that person has listened to a teacher I know is wrong.

I won't talk to them again. Surprisingly common. And the internet is full of screeds of anger and vitriol. And church is sadly full sometimes of just unpleasant gossip.

Jude says no to all of that. His way is very much the way of mercy. Mercy, but mixed with real humility and fear. You look at these two verses, you see there's a progression from one end to the other.

[16:33] At the beginning, someone can be just doubting. Verse 22. Someone who's struggling inside. They've heard some teaching and they don't know what to do with it. Is it right? Is it wrong? They're in danger of going the wrong way, but they haven't yet.

Or, verse 23 at the start, they have begun to go wrong. They've begun to be convinced of teaching that is very dangerous. And they are in danger. They're in the fire, as it were, here.

And the most dangerous of all, there are those who are deeply involved in that teaching and the way of life it allows. That's the end of verse 23. Those whose clothes are stained.

That's a picture of being deeply involved in the muck of sin. Now, for the first group, we have to be really gentle. Jude's main thing that he says about that is that we are to have mercy.

We need to be the kind of people that others can share those doubts and struggles with when there are still doubts before their convictions, when they're open to being helped and encouraged.

[17:35] So we need to be gentle and gracious to acknowledge that they need a helping hand, but so often do we. That means openness.

It means being willing to take people out for coffee and chat through things. It means being open with our own hearts and our own convictions as we talk. It's often quite hard, especially if someone is close to us.

It may be unsettling to us to talk through these things when they're not just theoretical things far away, but something that we have to wrestle with in our own selves.

And that is worth doing for someone who could be brought back to full confidence in the way of Jesus Christ. For the second, though, those Jude talks about as those who need to be snatched from the fire.

We need very great care. If people have accepted this kind of teaching, they are in real risk. Fire in the Bible is a picture of judgment. And that means it is so important to rescue them, doesn't it?

[18:42] And how urgent it is to rescue them. If someone's in a burning building, you don't wait around and maybe say, would you be willing to chat to me at some point about whether you should perhaps consider coming out of the burning building if it's not too much trouble to you?

Get the ladder out. Get up that ladder. Grab onto them. We've got to abandon, at times, our British reluctance reluctance to talk about these things, about things that are deep in people's hearts and convictions and be open and honest about the danger people are in.

And then for the third group, it goes even further. These are people deeply involved in the teaching and the way of life. They've abandoned the biblical way of life. They've gone for something quite different.

And Jude says, you still have to rescue them. There's no letting them go. There's no abandoning them. Not at all. Show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

As I said, the garment, the clothing is a picture of a life stained by the sins that they're involved in. We have no hate for the person. That's clear. But we hate the things that they've got involved with and the impact it's had on their life.

[20:00] And we do it with fear, aware that we are not so invulnerable as we like to think ourselves. We're not talking down to them. We're not talking down from a position of superiority.

We're reaching a hand down to someone in a mess we could easily get ourselves in. So we need to be very careful that we aren't dragged into the same things. Now, a quick word about a particular danger.

When it comes to being in a church, there are two dangers. If a church has teaching that is deeply unbiblical. Now, when I'm talking about this, I am not talking about churches that disagree with each other over the regular things, whether you baptize or children or not, precise interpretations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit or not.

Those things we can disagree about. But a church in which the true teaching of the gospel has been abandoned, when biblical truth has been abandoned, where bits of the Bible are discarded, there are two possible thoughts that we can have.

One is just to abandon it and go and just leave them all to stew in their own juices. Now, Jude says we do have a responsibility to those we know. I think that's very clear.

[21 : 23] But then equally, and on the other hand, we've got to acknowledge the danger to ourselves. Jude says that we're to be rescuing people with fear, not confident in our own ability to keep going, not thinking that just by being there we will change everything all by ourselves.

You know, I've known many people who have stuck at it out in churches that are very, very bad, all alone, without others around them to support them and help them in that. And maybe their faith was strong and they kept going and they didn't abandon it, but five or ten or fifteen years right down the road, they might still be believing, but their joy, their confidence in God is sapped.

Their hunger for Him is often gone. It's very hard to say strong in a situation like that. We need to treat these situations, as Jude says, with fear.

Now, going from that note of fear, we come to the end of Jude's letter, twenty-four and twenty-five. These are really significant verses. Jude has given us commands that are serious, but he finishes not with that, but with deep confidence in the God who keeps us.

And this is unusual. This is the longest ending of a letter of this type in the whole of the New Testament. He's full of praise to God and not just praise, he praises Him in a way that reminds his readers and us that we can have absolute confidence in the God who rescues us.

[23 : 00] He is entrusting them and us to God. And what a God. He is able, it says, to keep us from stumbling. If you keep on with this God, you keep close to Him, you will be safe from the dangers I have talked about, says Jude.

You will be able to keep going. And your destination will be certain because one day He will present you in the throne room of heaven itself, blameless, with every sin wiped away and your heart completely remade before the presence of the glory of God.

You know, you'll step before the throne of the one who made the stars and galaxies, the one who will judge all evil and destroy it forever. And you'll come before Him, it says, with great joy because He will have brought you to Himself blameless.

That is the God we praise. That is the God who we serve. And that is the God who will keep us. Forever. We are in God's hands.

We must take all these dangers we have talked about for the last three weeks seriously. And there is never a reason to panic even if they are serious because this is our God.

[24 : 20] And if He keeps us, nothing else can sweep us away. So whoever we are, Christian or not, let's now put our trust in that God that He might keep us forever.

Let's close with a prayer. Almighty God, we pray that You will keep us steadfast in this truth.

That You will keep us contending for the faith, united in prayer, united in building one another up in the faith. and that You would make us one in joy and courage and confidence in You, the God who can keep us and will keep us to the very end.

Now, to Him who is able to keep all and each and every one of you from stumbling and to present you blameless before 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.

Amen. Amen.