

How to Contend: Look Out and Up

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[0 : 00] This evening, Paul Brennan is joined to close our studies together in the letter of Jude. And so as we've been doing week by week, we're going to read through this letter together before returning shortly to look at the last few verses with Paul.

So the letter of Jude, and we're going to read the whole thing. If you're struggling to find it, it's the second last book just before Revelation.

Beginning 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 find 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.

[1 : 24] 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 morality, pursued unnatural desire, 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 the blasphemous judgment, but said, the Lord rebuke you.

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!

[2 : 44] 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, 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.

These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires. They are loud mouth boosters, 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.

[4 : 34] 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.

Amen. Amen. Well, this is God's word, and we'll return to it shortly. Well, please have the book of Jude's open information.

It's our last visit to the book of Jude, for now. And please, particularly, be looking at the last few verses. We'll be looking at verses 22, to the end, this evening.

Now, Jesus is building his church, and there is nothing in all this world that can stop him from doing that. He's building his church, and it's unstoppable.

[6 : 02] Men and women, boys and girls, are being added to his eternal family every day. And as Christians, as those united in Christ, our destiny is certain.

We are kept in him forever. That's one of the key points in Jude's little letter. You are kept. You are safe for all eternity, if you're in Christ. We are part of his universal, everlasting church.

That is absolutely certain. And that's hugely encouraging, isn't it? Christ is sovereign, and Christ will be glorified as his church is built.

But at the same time, we do have obligations in the here and now. And we have obligations to fight for Christ's church, and to contend for the faith when it comes under threat.

That is why Jude wrote this letter. He wrote, appealing to the church, all Christians, not just ministers, it's a letter to the whole church, to contend for the faith.

[7 : 08] And he writes, because there was an enemy they hadn't noticed. There was an unseen enemy who'd slipped in.

Enemies of the gospel had crept into their midst and was speaking a false gospel. And Jude writes, he writes to shake his first readers, and he writes to shake us, to help us when the time comes to spot the danger.

To spot what has perhaps gone unnoticed. Jude is preparing us in this letter to contend for the faith. And there are three ways to do that.

And we see that at the end of this letter. From verse 20 to the end, Jude tells us how we are to contend for the faith. We've seen the urgency, we've seen the danger. He's helped us to spot those dangerous people.

But how are we to do it? Well, three directions to look in. One is inward. And we saw that last week. And the key thing, start of verse 21, is to keep yourselves in the love of God.

[8 : 16] How do you do that? Well, verse 20, you build yourselves up in the most holy faith, you pray in the Holy Spirit, and you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

So look in first. Look to yourselves. But secondly, we look to others. And that's really the focus this evening.

Verses 22 and 23. We look to others. We have a duty to help others. And in doing that, we contend for the faith. And then lastly, verses 24 and 25, we must look up.

We must look up to our God. to the only one who will keep us secure forever. So three directions. We look in, we look out, and we look up. And tonight, we're going to spend most of our time on the second, looking out to others, but also look at the third, looking up to the Lord himself.

So Jude, as part of his plea to contend for the faith, he's urging us to look out, firstly, for those who are around us. That's what's in his sights in verses 22, and 23.

[9 : 29] Let me read those verses again. He says, 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. So in Jude's sights, in these two verses, are, I think, beloved brothers and sisters who have come under the influence of the dangerous teachers that Jude outlines in the book.

He refers to them all the way through as these people. Again and again, you get the repeated phrase, these people are the danger. And the people he's talking about in verses 22 and 23 have come under the influence of these people.

These people, according to Jude, are dangerous. They are devoid of the spirit. End of verse 19. They are not real believers.

They're dangerous. But the people of verses 22 and 23 are real believers. But they're people in need of help. They are distinct.

[10:39] They're a different group from the dangerous peddlers of what you might call Instagram Christianity. They look the business, but there's nothing really there. The people of verse 22 and 23 have been influenced by the Instagram Christianity people.

And these people, he talks about in verses 22 and 23, they were once part of the regular flock.

Perhaps real pillars in the church, but they've begun to wander away.

They've wavered in their faith. They're beginning to drift. And people like that, Jude says, need to be rescued. They've got to be brought back into the family of faith.

And as Jude turns his attention outward, his call to contend for the faith with regards to those who have been sucked in by these false teachers, it's not a call to go in all guns blazing.

Jude isn't handing out a license for heavy-handedness. Rather, it's a contending that's marked by mercy. A real desire to bring people back who've strayed away.

[11:52] It is a contending marked by warm-heartedness and care for those who are in danger of walking away from the faith.

And he's calling us to be rescuers. Will you be rescuers of those who are wandering away? We're to do it with an attitude of mercy.

We get that word twice in these two verses. What does it say in verse 22? And have mercy on those who doubt. And again at the end, show mercy with fear.

That is the attitude we are to demonstrate as we contend for the faith and seek to win people back.

It's mercy. A harsh, censorious sort of attitude is only going to have the opposite effect, isn't it?

Just think back on your own life. Reflect on your own Christian walk. It's the moments when folk have shown you gentleness and mercy when you've gone off track.

[12:59] It's those moments, it's those people that have actually won you back to the faith. You've come to your senses. You've returned to following the Lord Jesus. A harsh word of that moment, someone heavy-handed and censorious, that would put you off, wouldn't it?

It would turn you away. And so Jude is urging him, mercy. Have mercy. Not hardness. And he's not saying, by the way, compromise on the truth, not at all.

Quite the opposite. But how we go about it, we speak truth but we do it with mercy. And there are three particular groups that he has in mind in these couple of verses.

Three different groups. and he begins with those who are perhaps less in danger. There's a progression in these verses in terms of the danger.

He begins by addressing those who are doubting, verse 22, but by the end, the people he's dealing with at the end of verse 23, they're really in over their heads. They've really been sucked in by these false teachers.

[14:05] So there seems to be a bit of a progression in terms of the danger that these people are in. So let's take each of these groups, let's look at these three things, each group in order.

So the first group that Jude has in mind is those who are wavering, verse 22. The first group he mentions there are those who doubt.

these are people who are perhaps a bit unsure about what they really believe. They're perhaps intrigued by some of the things that these false teachers have been saying.

They might be under something, they wonder. Have they got the answer? It all looks very attractive. But the sort of gospel being peddled by these false teachers, it is an attractive one.

It looks good. Their gospel is one that goes down well with the world because, remember, back in verse 4, we saw the characteristics of what these people were doing.

[15:10] The gospel they proclaim goes down well with the world because it was a gospel that turned God's grace into a license for sensuality. Sure, you can follow whatever desires you have.

Go ahead. That's quite an attractive gospel, isn't it? They deny Jesus, Master and Lord, end of verse 4. You don't really owe obedience to Jesus.

It's like, follow your own heart. Go your own way. Their gospel was a less costly gospel and therefore it was attractive. Which of us wouldn't be tempted at times by an easier gospel that allows us to indulge sinful temptations?

That's an attractive gospel. It's a gospel more palatable to the world around us. And so, these people that Jude warns about, they looked the part.

It was a very attractive message they were putting out and they'd slipped in unnoticed. People hadn't realized the danger. Their appearance of godliness was deceptive.

[16:17] And these people didn't look dangerous to your average church member. people have begun to doubt. Have they got the actual, are these guys got the actual truth?

It looks much better. I might just go and follow these guys over here. They look the part. And we're a trusting lot, aren't we? We take people at face value most of the time, especially if they use all the right evangelical buzzwords and they look successful.

We tend to give people the green light without really interrogating them. And proper interrogation is what Jude is urging all of us to do. He's saying, look more carefully.

Look deeper. Be more discerning. Does what they're saying really match up with what the Bible says? Notice what's really driving these people.

We've seen this over the past few weeks. What's really at the heart? What's really motivating them? Observe carefully the fruit of their ministry. Because over time the truth will come out.

[17:27] Look carefully. Observe what they're really like. And look hard enough and carefully enough and the truth will become apparent. But many won't do that.

Many won't exercise discernment. They'll be sucked in. And so people begin to doubt. They begin to listen to these people that Jude's warning about.

They start to enjoy what they're hearing. But at the same time they're not fully convinced.

Something's gnawing at the back of their mind. Their conscience is stirred.

They're warned against following these people. But they can't quite pin it down. They can't quite pinpoint what the issue is. They are doubting the once for all delivered to the saints' faith.

But neither are they fully convinced by these false teachers. And Jude says to such people we're to show mercy. We're not to condemn them or be heavy handed.

[18:33] Remember all of us. Every Christian is a recipient of mercy. Every Christian is to show that very same to those who are wavering in the faith. Show mercy. So what if you have someone like that?

Maybe one of your friends they become influenced by something you think is just not right. That's dangerous. What do you do? If someone's beginning to waver in their faith?

Well I think we're to spend time with such people. Help them to see for themselves the very real danger that these people that Jude warns about warn them and help them see the real danger.

Patiently feel the real genuine questions. Talk through why the once for all delivered to the saints' faith is the only faith and that these false teachers are departing from that.

They're headed to destruction. So take the time to sit down with someone and talk through these things. It's worth pondering are you the sort of person that could help someone who is doubting and questioning?

[19:44] Are you the sort of person that someone could turn to? Are you known? Are you marked by being a person of mercy? Or are you a person marked by hardness and harshness?

I could never go to them. I could never talk to them. What sort of a person are you? Would someone come and comfortably share their concerns? Would you have mercy on them?

You see there is something wrong I think if we're so driven to achieve theological purity that folk are just so hesitant to come to us to raise legitimate questions without fear of being humiliated.

I think there's something wrong if that's the case. So let's just consider our own attitudes. Are we people known for mercy and gentleness? Will people come if they are struggling, if they're having questions?

So we're not to be hard or heavy handed but rather we're to show mercy to those who doubt. We're to show kindness and offer real friendship and kindness and mercy.

[20:52] And I think about people who've shown me mercy in the past. I'm sure you can think of others who've shown you when you've been doubting and being foolish. Think about how they spoke to you how they won you over.

Ponder how you could be more like them so that you in turn will bring somebody back somebody who's doubting. Could you be that person to show mercy to them? So that's the first group that Jude has in mind here.

Those who are beginning just to drift offside. They're doubting. And to people like that we're to show mercy. The second group or a bit further in. These are people who've believed the lies.

He says save others by snatching them out of the fire. fire. These are people who are more than just doubting. They have dipped their toes firmly into the pool of the false teacher's sensuality and sinful behavior.

The people in this category have gone beyond doubts and are actually playing with fire. They've begun to engage in the thinking and the lifestyle of these people who are changing the grace of God into a license for sensuality.

[22 : 10] And for such folk Jude tells us to save them. They need saving. They're a real danger. Save them by snatching them out of the fire.

And the assumption Jude is making here is that even these people are within reach of rescue. They're not too far gone. Restoration is possible. And Jude is taking this image from the prophet Zechariah chapter 3 where Zechariah has this vision of Joshua being plucked from the fire. And the point Jude is making is this. In the same way that Joshua was plucked from the fire with his filthy garments he was restored. And such people in the church who've been sucked in they're in the fire they're in it with the false teachers they can be plucked from that fire they can be restored it's possible.

And Jude urges us to save them rescue them. They perhaps don't see how far they've strayed from the real gospel. Their behavior flies in the face of all that God has commanded but they have the words of the teachers the false teachers in their minds justifying their behavior and they can't see the danger they're in.

They don't want to see it perhaps. And so if you know somebody like that if somebody's got that far in they don't see the danger well Jude's saying you've got a responsibility you've got a responsibility to help them to rescue them because they've not seen the danger themselves we need to get involved.

[23 : 52] Perhaps you need to take responsibility for the spiritual health of a friend even tonight. This may mean when we get home tonight picking up the phone calling that friend who's begun to turn their back on the Lord.

Perhaps they are in a relationship that is just not unwise but actually contrary to God's commands. Do you need to have a frank conversation with them? It may be that you know someone who's been sucked in by one of the many false teachers online.

Perhaps they've swallowed without thinking a whole set of podcasts that cause you real alarm. Do you need to point out the errors? Persuade them to stop listening, to see sense.

And having those sorts of conversations is not going to be like having a nice walk in the park and going for a coffee. Jude's language, what's his language here? He says save them by snatching them out of the fire.

It's going to be uncomfortable. It means having the difficult conversation, confronting our friends with the reality of the danger they're in and it's likely we'll get our fingers burnt.

[25 : 06] We may have to endure some pain, but we do it because they're in very real danger. We're to pluck them out of the fire.

That's his language. Snatch them out. Don't stand idly by hoping somebody else will sort it or it'll just all work out. Don't assume that. Jude says take responsibility.

Make that call. Have that conversation. If you're not sure what to do, chat to your growth group leader. Chat to one of the ministers or whoever it is.

Find some help, but do something. Don't just hope for the best. Jude is urging us, when we see a friend in danger, take responsibility. Snatch them out of the fire.

Well, that's the second group. And the third group is the most serious of the groups. This is those who have not just doubted or dipped their toes in.

[26 : 05] They are fully involved. They fully come under the influence of these teachers. They are all in. They're up to their necks with the false doctrine and the false living of these people.

And it would be very tempting to think that these people really are beyond the pale. They're too far gone. They completely abandoned the faith. I can't do anything. But no, that's what Jesus said.

Look, he says, we're still to show mercy. To others, he says, end of verse 23, to others, show mercy. But Jude is careful to add something.

He says, mercy with fear. Fear of what? What does that mean? I think the rest of the sentence helps us.

Jude says, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. When we see someone who's in so deep, they're fully involved in a really sinful lifestyle or they're so far gone, we're to be careful, says Jude.

[27 : 13] You must be careful when dealing with people like that, that we too are not sucked in. Don't be naive, is what he's saying. They've been drawn in, but let's not be tempted to think we're

somehow above it all.

It would be quite easy to be drawn in and join them actually, in their belief and their behavior. So we must, as we seek to help, watch ourselves, as we seek to help others and rescue them from their sin.

perhaps we realize that the particular issue that this person's dealing with is just not something that I can deal with, I can't help them. It may be the thing that they're struggling with, but it's also something I've struggled with in the past.

Perhaps there's somebody else who's better placed to help. And so we need to be realistic as we seek to help folk who've wandered away. For our own sake, we need to hate even the garments stayed by the flesh.

But for their sake as well, we need them to hate the garments stained by the flesh. We need to help them see the danger of their own sin as well.

[28 : 26] So we are to try and bring such people back to the one true faith. And we do that by hating the stained clothing. That is the results of their sinful behavior, their sinful activity.

Be fearful about that. Be realistic about the danger. And so we're to be crystal clear as we get alongside someone who's in that position.

As we get alongside them, we really must help them see that their behavior really is unacceptable. It is, in reality, a rejection of the lordship of Jesus.

It's a denial of the grace of God. They really do need to repent of this particular thing. we've got to help them see the danger of it.

Help them to repent. Let me read to you a little paragraph from Dick Lucas on this particular verse. He says, if the people Jude is describing are repenting, what we must expect of them is a complete reverse of lifestyle and a change of attitude toward their past.

[29 : 34] For their sake, we cannot afford to require anything less of them. Their former lifestyle and attitude are what the gospel is saving them from. And so we must show no compromise.

compromise. We cannot lower God's standards in the hope that if the terms are easier, more people will repent. That is to love the clothing and hate the sinner because it denies the seriousness of their plight.

So we must be realistic about the danger that these folk are in. We must confront such people in love and with the truth. We can't pretend that their dirty clothes are clean.

No, we must say their dirty clothes really are dirty and need to be got rid of through the forgiveness that comes only through Jesus as we repent. And helping people to see that, helping people to see the seriousness of the sin they're in, that is merciful.

That is a kind thing to do. We do people no favors in seeking to protect their feelings. We do people no favors in if we pretend their sin is not serious.

[30 : 50] And so we are to show mercy with fear. And by doing that, we may well rescue some who seem to us too far gone. That is what it looks like to contend for the faith, says Jude.

It's real. It's personal. It means not pretending things away, but dealing with the mess and reality of life. It means getting involved, seeking to restore people, to rescue them when they've gone astray. And none of us, none of us is immune from that. None of us is beyond listening to things that are not true. None of us is beyond the influence of people like this that Jude warns about.

God. You see, one day, it might be you or I who is doubting or playing with fire. And what you will need and what I will need on that day is a faithful friend who shows us mercy and who is willing to do the difficult thing, to rescue you, to bring us back to the one true faith, to restore us.

that might be us one day needing that. And so will you be that friend today for somebody who's wandering off? Perhaps you could show that mercy to a friend even tonight.

[32 : 17] So to others, says Jude, we are to show mercy. That is how we contend for the faith. So Jude says, look in, build yourselves up, keep yourselves in the love of God, show mercy to others, rescue them when they're straying.

And the last direction to look is upward. And we close with these wonderful verses at the end of this letter. And these are wonderful familiar words, aren't they?

We often read them at the end of a service, verses 24 and 25. But let's forget our familiarity for a moment and notice what Jude is saying and why he's saying it here. In these last words, he points us to our great father in heaven and says that he is able.

He is able to do two great and wonderful reassuring things for the Christian believer. He is able to keep you from stumbling and he is able to present you blameless before his glory on the great day of judgment.

He is able, says Jude, to keep you from stumbling. Why does Jude need to remind those he's writing to of this great truth?

[33 : 35] Why do we need reminded of that? Well, there is much that might trip up the Christian in this letter. Certainly there was much to trip up as original readers and there is much today that might trip us up in the form of these people, these false teachers who come in the midst.

That's always been the case through church history. There's always been people in the midst seeking to draw people away to a false gospel. There are trip hazards at every turn as we respond to Jude's plea to contend for the faith.

But we're reassured that we undertake our responsibilities certain that God is sovereign, that he will keep us from stumbling.

As we keep ourselves in him, he will keep us. And his keeping us from stumbling goes hand in hand with our undertaking of our responsibilities.

Both go together. We want to see this reassurance as a call to do nothing. Because he keeps us, we can just sit back. No, he keeps us and so we keep in him.

[34 : 47] We work at our faith. And as we do that, he will not let us go. He is able to keep us. That's the great reassurance.

It's what Jude began the letter with, it's what he finishes with. He will keep you from stumbling. And, secondly, he's able to present you blameless.

After delivering his urgent, difficult message about contending and condemnation, Jude provides more great assurance for his beloved Christian brothers and sisters than and now, that on that great day of judgment that he's looking forward to, we will stand before him blameless.

And it's because not of anything that you or I can do, but because we have a savior in Jesus Christ who died in our place for our sin. You see, in an instance, we will be swept up one day from this world of hardship and suffering and contending and battles.

We'll be swept up and in a moment we'll be there finding ourselves on the brink of eternity before our Lord and Savior and being welcomed into a new creation. It will be a day of great joy, says Jude, for we will see Jesus, our laws, in all his majesty and glory and dominion and authority.

[36 : 19] And on that day, every effort we have expended in this world will have been worth it. Every ounce of energy we put into contending for the faith now will have been worth it.

Every person we've gone out of our way for and shown mercy to and snatched out of the fire, it will be worth it because we have a glorious future. And that is why Jude ends on these words.

He says, ponder that. Ponder that glorious future which is certain for you, dear Christian, think on it. Nothing else will equip us so well for contending here and now than having our eyes fixed firmly on the future where we will reign with Jesus our Lord and Master forever.

And he will keep us. He will keep you until that day. And so knowing that, grasping that, that's what's going to help us contend for the faith.

Well, let's pray, shall we? And then we'll sing before we gather around the table. Father, help us to see the preciousness of your church, the church that Lord Jesus died for.

[37 : 48] And so when difficulties come, when people come in and seek to distort the one true faith, help us to be a people prepared to contend, help us to be a people that are prepared prepared, to save others by showing mercy to them.

And Lord, how we need your help in order to do this. And so would you keep our eyes fixed on you who keeps us. And please keep us, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.