

Contend for the Faith

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now for our reading this evening. Last week, Paul Brennan began a series of studies in the letter of Jude. And last week, we read the whole letter.

We're just going to read a few verses at the beginning this week. But you can perhaps read through the whole letter when we pause for the musicians to play during the offering time.

I'm just going to read the opening verses here, first four verses of this short letter. Here's from Jude, one of the half-brothers of our Lord Jesus Christ and one of the key leaders of the Jerusalem church.

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.

[1 : 2 1] For certain people have crept in unnoticed. Long ago, we're designated for this condemnation. Unnoticed ungodly people who pervert the grace of God into sensuality and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, we're going to be looking at these verses shortly with Paul Rennon in some detail. But as you can see just from reading them, it's about battles.

Battles for the truth, which will be part of the church's calling. Good. Well, good to see you here this evening.

And you can't see this, but there's a live screen of the live feed over here. And I always wear light blue shirts, which matches almost perfectly. So it's like a disembodied head I can see over there.

It's a bit distracting. I need to wear bright red or something. But I do have Jude open in front of you. And we'll look at these verses this evening, verses 3 and 4 of this short letter.

[2 : 3 2] And Jude writes, So Winston Churchill, long before he became prime minister, long before the start of World War II, had been issuing warnings about Hitler and the rise of the Third Reich.

He sought to expose the fantasy of appeasement. He was sounding the alarm. In October 1938, he spoke these words in the House of Commons.

He said, He said, All is over. Silence, mournful, abandoned, broken. Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness. We are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude which has befallen Great Britain and France.

Do not let us blind ourselves to that. Our people should know the truth. They should know that there has been a gross neglect and deficiency in our defenses. They should know that we have sustained a defeat without a war.

And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip. The first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year.

- [4 : 11] Unless, by supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigor, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time. Churchill saw Hitler for what he was when others could not or would not see the danger.

His persistent warning, his courageous exposure of Hitler's designs eventually roused a nation to war they had to fight. And Jude is doing something similar in this letter.

He is exposing what has apparently gone unnoticed. A deadly danger is lurking in the church and Jude is unveiling it and appealing to the church to take up spiritual arms.

This is an appeal to contend, to fight. And we also need to heed this warning. And to be prepared to see what we have perhaps not seen before.

We need to be constantly prepared to fight for the faith. The one true faith. Because it has always come under threat. And it will continue to come under threat until the very end.

- [5 : 25] And the threat, here in Jude at least, is from within. It's just what we saw this morning in Matthew 24. Jesus himself warned, didn't he, of the threat from within.

And here, just a few decades after those words spoken by Jesus, the church is under threat from within. Now the basic outline of the letter is straightforward.

The details require a bit of unpacking, as we'll see. But the basic plan of the letter is clear. The central plea of the letter comes wrapped, as we saw last week, in profound reassurances that we are kept by God for all eternity.

Christian, you are loved. You are kept. You're called. You are secure forever because you belong to the Lord. And having those foundations in place, clear in our minds, in our hearts, that's going to be essential for what's to come.

Knowing who we are is going to be essential for the battles we must fight in the future. And in his letter, Jude answers, or he asks, and then answers three basic questions.

- [6 : 37] First, what must the church do? Second, why must the church do it? And three, how must the church do it? So what must the church do? Well, as we'll think about this evening.

Jude's central appeal is that the church will contend for the one true faith. That's in verse three. Why must the church do it? Why must they contend? Well, the church must contend because leaders have slipped in unnoticed.

And they present a huge threat to the future of the church. And these ungodly men threaten the future of the church because they undermine both the belief and the behavior of the church.

That's verse four. And having stated his case in verse four, Jude then goes on in verses five to 19 to make his case. He gives the evidence for his basic case.

Thirdly, how must the church do it? How must the church contend? Well, we see that in the final few verses of the letter from verse 20 to the end. And Jude points us in three directions.

- [7 : 43] Inward, outward, and then upward. We're going to focus tonight on verses three and four. Where we see an outline. Jude's central appeal to his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ.

His urgent appeal to contend for the faith. And when faced with the internal threats of enemies within, within the professing church, there are a couple of main options that are open to the church when this reality emerges.

One is to maintain the fantasy, to stick one's head in the sand. And the second is to face reality. So the first thing we'll see, start of verse three, is the lure of an easier path.

The lure of an easier path. The letter Jude wanted to write. See, Jude wanted to write a quite different letter to the one he ended up writing.

Look at the other side of verse three. That's the letter he wanted to write. And as Christians, our minds and hearts are naturally drawn to the great joys of the faith, to the common salvation that we share.

[9 : 09] The common salvation that Jude speaks of here. Not just our forgiveness of sins in the past. Not just our present enjoyment of fellowship with Jesus by the Spirit.

But also our future salvation. When we will at last see our Savior and reign with him forever. That is the wonderful joy of being part of God's eternal family.

As a Christian, you've been rescued out of darkness into glorious light. The light of his everlasting kingdom. We have a glorious future. It is a salvation we enjoy elements of now.

But one day, we will fully realize our salvation. It's a glorious privilege, isn't it? To call God our Father. To know Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

To have the Spirit dwell within us. It's the greatest privilege we could ever know. And you can understand, therefore, why Jude would be eager to write about that. He wants to write about the salvation they enjoy together.

[10 : 15] And that would have been an easier, less painful letter to write. To write about the joys of our common salvation. I'm sure there was just a temptation for him just to crack on with that letter.

To write about the letter he longed to write. But if Jude was to remain faithful to his calling. If he was truly to shepherd the people of God. Then he had to forego the letter he wanted to write.

In order to write the letter he had to write. And it's a great temptation. In the Christian life. And especially for those charged with leadership in the church.

There's that temptation to take the easier path. Always. Because there's always an easier path to take. Every conflict. Every difficult situation presents a choice.

To tackle the issue. Or take the easier path. That is always the choice. Now it's not wrong. To talk about our common salvation.

[11 : 21] There's nothing wrong with the letter that Jude wanted to write at all. Of course not. But sometimes the problem must be faced. The error must be addressed. And that is what Jude does.

And that is what we must be prepared to do as well. To plant our head firmly in the sand. When the gospel is under threat. Both in terms of teaching or morality. That might be the easier path to take.

Just to ignore it. Just to put our head in the sand. And say it will blow over. Don't have to get involved. But that is the wrong path to take. Jude opts to take the harder path.

And we must be prepared to do that as well. There is always an easier path. There's always that easier letter to write. But Jude didn't. And we mustn't.

So the second thing we'll spend most of our time this evening. The necessity of facing reality. And this is the letter that Jude had to write. He says, beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation.

[12 : 27] I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith. So what sort of letter is Jude to write?

Well, he says, I'm appealing to you. I found it necessary to write appealing. He's writing an appeal. This is not an FYI memo that Jude is issuing here.

He wasn't just setting out some of his latest thinking. He wasn't just writing to provide his fellow believers with some interesting theology to chew over. No, this letter is an appeal.

This is a plea to action. I think his first readers would have sat a little bit straighter in their seats when they heard this particular part of the letter. He's expressed his longing to write about their common salvation.

But I just couldn't do that, he said. I appeal to you. I've got something you've got to listen to. I had to write another letter to plea with you to take action.

[13 : 32] He implores. He urgently appeals to them. This is serious, he's saying. I need your attention. I'm about to ask something of you.

It's an appeal. It's a call to action. It's not just some interesting information. It's an appeal. But an appeal to do what? Well, it's an appeal to contend.

Jude's plea. Contend for the faith. Once for all delivered to the saints. We need to feel the force of that word contend.

It's a word steeped in the imagery of the Greek games. We need to imagine athletes straining, agonizing, contending for a medal. They're striving, sweating, giving all to win the prize.

Jude isn't calling to some sort of passive activity. No. Quite the opposite. He's calling them to agonize and to strive for the faith that they share. This is a call to action.

[14 : 43] Now, I love sport. And I don't get to play quite as much as I'd like to. But I enjoy watching it. I enjoy reading about it. And I really enjoy all those behind-the-scenes documentaries that there are stacks of at the moment.

You sort of see what goes on outside of the pitch. You see all the hard work that goes on. Often unseen. And it's all that work, unseen, that delivers the results on the pitch.

I particularly enjoy one about Tom Brady recently. He's an American footballer. He's a quarterback. He's entering his 23rd season in the NFL.

He's 44. And still going strong. Still winning Super Bowls. Amazing. But to see the level of dedication, the hard work, the unseen contending, striving.

It's hugely impressive. His whole life. His diet. His sleep. His time in the gym. Everything is geared towards that agonizing, contending that happens on the football field.

[15 : 38] And that's the image that Jude is pressing here. He's urging us likewise to contend. To contend for the faith. To lay aside everything for the sake of the gospel.

To contend for the faith. And Jude's first readers and us today must be prepared to heed that call.

We're not to sit back hoping others will do the contending for us. No, we're all to be active to play our part in contending for the faith. We're not to sit back in the stands if we are watching the Olympic Games.

No, we're there to be there on the field of battle contending. So are you prepared to strive intensely to preserve the faith handed down to us?

Are you willing to make sacrifices for the once delivered faith? Contending in this sense that Jude is urging us to. It's not something we can just fit around our comfortable lives.

[16 : 45] Between Netflix and the gym and nice meals out. There's nothing wrong with those things in themselves, of course. But are you prepared to forego those things when the time comes?

Are you prepared to prioritize contending above everything else? Are you willing to do what is necessary for the sake of contending for the faith? And to prioritize what he calls us to.

Later on in the letter in verses 20 to the end. He tells us how we're to do it. And we'll see that in a few weeks. But the principle is there.

Are you prepared to contend? Are you willing to strive as an athlete? Winning the prize. That is Jude's appeal.

Will you contend? But what are we contending for? It's all very well. Gearing ourselves up to contend. But what are we contending for? What is the battle that needs to be won?

[17 : 46] Well, Jude tells us it's for the faith. Look at the end of verse 3. Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

The faith is defined. It's coherent. It's coherent. It's complete. Notice again how Jude describes and defines it.

He says it's once for all delivered. It is in the past tense. It's been delivered. It's not a constantly evolving, constantly changing body of revelation. No, it is complete.

The apostolic age is over. It was delivered once in the past. And it's all to do with the historical events of the life, death, resurrection, ascension and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is these events which wonderfully fulfill all the Old Testament promises and anticipations in the scriptures. And it's the implications of these events for every human being in the world.

[18 : 50] The gospel has been given and it can't be changed. It can't be edited. It can't be updated. It has been delivered to the church once.

And it is this faith that we are to contend for. That probably seems like a fairly obvious thing to say to the Tron church.

If you've been here for any length of time, that seems like an obvious thing to say. But two things in that regard. One, we must never assume it. We must never assume that everyone is on board with the fact that the gospel is once for all delivered to the saints.

We do not assume that everyone gets it. What one generation assumes, the next quickly forgets and moves on from. We must constantly affirm the once for all delivered to the saints' faith.

Two, much of the broader Christian world is not on board with this. At the click of a button, the press of our finger on our phone, there's an unlimited world of Christian teaching and blogs and influences out there.

[20 : 00] Some of it is good and helpful. But much of it does not share our understanding of the nature of revelation. To them, the faith is not. It is not once for all delivered to the saints.

Rather, for many, new revelation is always coming. God speaks in dreams. New words of revelation are coming. The faith must remain culturally relevant.

I've got a new word. It must move on with the times. No. Jude says no. The faith is once for all delivered to the saints.

It is fixed. It is final. You cannot tinker with it. And it's here in his word. Unchanged. That is the faith we're to contend for.

That is the faith that you are to be prepared to contend for. But why do we need to contend? If it's all here, it's all set out.

[21 : 02] Why do we need to contend for it? Why was Jude appealing to his brothers and sisters there to contend for the faith? Well, Jude tells us there are immoral people in the midst.

Verse 4. 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.

The arena in which this contending is to take place, Jude now defines for us. This is not an appeal to contend with outside forces.

No, this is an issue much closer to home, and therefore, in many senses, much more difficult and painful. The task is an internal one. The problem is not out there, but rather this is an issue within the church.

Jude is unveiling the reality that there are immoral people in their midst. Now, they have either not seen the danger, or they've deliberately chosen not to see it.

[22 : 22] It's amazing what we can turn a blind eye to in order not to ruffle feathers to keep the peace. But we don't know why they didn't see it, but they didn't. And Jude will not countenance, sticking the one's head in the sand.

He calls out the danger. He exposes the reality. And he tells us what they're like, and what they're doing. The first thing he tells us, they are unnoticed.

He says, certain people have crept in unnoticed. This description suggests some sort of deceit. They've slipped in. They've hidden their true colors.

Their true motives they've not been upfront about. So successful have they been that they've slipped under the radar. Their true identities have remained hidden from view.

The extent of the real threat they pose has gone undetected. They didn't come in with t-shirts saying, I do not follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 24] They did not come in saying, I pervert the grace of God and sensuality. They looked the part. They used the right evangelical passwords.

Nothing obvious at first glance, perhaps to cause alarm. But Jude urges discernment. He urges his brothers and sisters to see what is actually going on in front of their eyes.

He says that these people are not actually Christians. Their teaching is dodgy. Look what he says. They are destined for condemnation. Ungodly people.

Jude is giving clarity here on the sort of people they are to deal with. These aren't just sort of mistaken fellow believers. These aren't immature believers.

No, these people are not believers at all. They are destined, says Jude, for condemnation. They are ungodly. And the condemnation that Jude speaks of here must be the judgment he goes to unpack later on in the letter.

[24 : 28] You see that from verse 5 onwards. Long ago, these people were destined for judgment. In other words, none of this has taken God by surprise. He knew this was coming.

He knew there would always be enemies of the gospel outside, but also from within. Enemies who would seek to destroy his most precious possession, the church. He knew.

We heard it this morning again, didn't we? In Matthew 24. Their ultimate destiny is not a happy one. They are destined for condemnation and judgment.

And this is because, says Jude, they are ungodly people. To be godless, it is the fundamental sin of living without reference to God.

It is to live as if God is not there. It doesn't exist. Be clear, says Jude. These people who have crept in are not fellow Christians.

[25 : 29] They may be in your midst, but they are set against God and his people. And that, I think, gives great clarity as they contemplate contending for the faith.

The faith really is at stake because of who these people really are. These really are enemies of the gospel. They need to be contended with. Now, of course, this is not to say that somebody who walks through the door and does not yet profess faith in the Lord Jesus is to be seen in this way.

Absolutely not. Those who do not profess faith are always welcome in the church. We are more and more people like that through our doors. People who don't yet know the Lord.

We want them to come and hear, see for themselves. That is not the sort of person that Jude has in mind here. The sincere inquirer is not who Jude has in his sights in this letter.

Not at all. He is not talking about that sort of person because of what he says next. Look at his description of these ungodly people. He talks about the fact they pervert the grace of our God into sensuality.

[26 : 40] And they deny our master and Lord Jesus Christ. These are not passive, genuine inquirers.

No, these are active enemies. They are seeking to destroy the church, to lead people astray. They demonstrate wonky belief and wicked behavior.

They pervert God's grace into sensuality. They seek to turn God's grace into a license for indulging in sensuality.

That's always been a danger in the church. It was 2,000 years ago as Jude wrote this letter. And it certainly is now. Our culture is running faster and faster in the direction of sensuality.

It's running faster and faster in the direction of sexual liberation. It's hard to see how much further it can go, but it can go further. And the church has largely capitulated.

[27 : 43] Just this week, the National Church voted to allow ministers to conduct and officiate at same-sex marriages. That is the definition of perverting God's grace into sensuality.

And because such sensuality is all around us, it is just the cultural air we breathe. It's a very real pressure within the church. There will be great pressure to soften our approach, to go quiet in those bits of the Bible we don't like or find embarrassing or controversial.

But the debates on LGBTQ plus within the church, they must be decided, mustn't they, on moral principles, on what the Bible teaches.

Not on what looks better to the wider culture, not what our cultural elites would define to us. The Bible itself must be the arbiter in those debates.

And so, one of the key tasks of the church and of Christian leaders is to teach what the Bible teaches in a coherent way about human sexuality and gender, about the preciousness of every life, whether in the womb or in the very oldest of age.

[28 : 59] And so these matters are and must continue to be addressed on Sundays in our different groups through the week. It's not that we're obsessed with these things.

It's quite the opposite. It's the world that is obsessed. But we must fight. Nonetheless, we do not choose the battlegrounds.

But we must fight there. So beware those people in the church claiming to be Christians that seek to push an unbiblical view on human sexuality and gender.

These people pervert the grace of our God and sensuality. They deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ. And there's a clear link between those two things.

Between wonky belief and wicked behavior. They go hand in hand. If someone is living a sensual lifestyle, their belief will soon follow suit to justify their behavior.

[30 : 00] If someone's theology is wrong, that will soon show up in how they behave. They pervert the grace of God. They deny our only Master and Lord.

And that's clear, isn't it? To deny Jesus as Lord will inevitably mean that they jettison his commands too. I don't want the Lord as my king.

I will jettison his commands. And in our culture, there is a strong push not only to deny Jesus as Lord, but to deny anyone as Lord over us.

Instead, we push self on the throne. We focus inward. The inner psychological life is the decisive thing when it comes to our identity. That determines our purpose in life.

Expressive individuals, that's the mantra of our age. We determine our future. And it's utterly set against Jesus as Lord.

[31 : 04] And again, given that is the cultural air we live in, it inevitably seeps into the church. But we must be prepared to contend for the one true faith.

Both in terms of belief, but also in terms of behavior. That is Jude's appeal. Be alert to those who would challenge the one true faith.

And his warning is, open your eyes. See the reality. Do not put your head in the sand. Do not turn a blind eye.

Do not take the easier path. Jude urges us to be prepared to contend. To see these people for who they are. Do not out of politeness humor them.

Do not out of some idea of kindness. Do not out of some idea of kindness. Leave them to spread their dangerous message. Do not out of lack of courage.

[32 : 01] Allow them to influence others. We must contend. You must be prepared, each of you, to contend for the faith.

Once for all delivered to the saints. And we'll see how in a few weeks time. But the principle this evening. Is a determined willingness.

To contend for the faith. God requires. That error be challenged. In his name. And we must be prepared to obey him in this regard.

However unpopular. That may well make us. The stakes are high. Urges Jude. Be prepared to contend. Let me pray.

And then we'll sing. Father we do thank you for your word. And please would you help us. Give us courage. To be prepared.

[33 : 01] To contend. Give us eyes to see. Where the faith. Once for all delivered to the saints. Is being challenged within the church. So help us Lord.

Encourage us. For we ask it in his name. Amen.