

*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James,
To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:
May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.
Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I
found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once
for all delivered to the saints.
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.*

Jude 1-4

“Contending for the Faith...”

In our scripture lesson today, from one of the last books of the New Testament, we see Jude, the brother of James and half-brother to Jesus, writing a letter to a church in turmoil. We see that “*certain people*” had “*crept in unnoticed*” into the church; who, while pretending to be godly people, were actually teaching a false gospel. Jude wrote this letter with the purpose of maintaining the purity and truth of the Christian faith.

For this reason, in the greeting of his letter, Jude introduces himself as the “*servant*” or it can also be translated, “*bondservant*” or “*slave*” of Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that Jude, as well as James his brother, both start their letters with identifying themselves as bondservants or slaves of Jesus. They were half brothers to Jesus but both of them considered the blood of the cross more important than the family blood that related them to Jesus.

Jude then addresses the letter to “*the called*.” We see that this was written to believers or Christians about issues that they needed to hear. Jude goes on to emphasize three things, first, Jude says that his readers were “*called*” by God, second, that they were “*beloved*” by God, other translations say “*sanctified by God*”. That is that they were set apart from the world by God. So, what we see is that the status as “*the called*” can be understood as the result of the love of God. The message for us today is that a believer’s status is to be understood as the ongoing result of God’s love both past and present.

Then, the third thing that Jude emphasizes is that “*the called*” are “*kept for Jesus Christ*”. In other words, Jesus Christ was their guardian and their protector. William Barclay in his commentary put it this way, “The Christian is never left alone.”

With this backdrop in mind, Jude begins his letter wanting to write to the early Christians about their “*common salvation*.” He wanted to get across to them the sense that we are all saved in “*common*.” In other words, to be a Christian is to be a part of a community. God doesn’t have one way for the rich and another way for the poor, or one way for the strong and another way for the weak. We all come to God the same way. That was what Jude wanted to write about, but he found that there was a great need in the church that he had to address.

So, Jude went on to appeal to the church to “*contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*.” The emphasis here is on a fixed core of truths known as “*the faith*.” So, what we see is that there is a concept called “*the faith*”, which are the things that we actually believe, not just a feeling of faith but the actual doctrines we believe and the way of life that “*the faith*” generates in us as believers.

So, when “*the faith*” comes under attack, we are told to contend for it, to fight for it. The Greek verb translated as “*contend*” has the sense of a continuous, on-going action. It has the sense of “to contend strenuously in defense of.” The New American Standard Bible says “*to contend earnestly*”. This is not like a physical fight, but rather it means that we are to choose “*the faith*” and defend the truth without compromise.

Jude tells us that it is “*once for all delivered to the saints*.” It cannot be changed, it cannot be altered, its’ foundational truths are non-negotiable. Our job is to preserve and defend those truths. There is no sense in saying, “I’m a Christian but I won’t take a stand on what the Bible actually says.” We can’t have two minds, saying one thing with our mouths and another with how we live our actual lives.

Finally, Jude tells us why we have to “*contend for the faith*”. The reason for the letter that Jude is writing to them, is the emergence of false teachers in the church. He will spend the bulk of the remainder of the letter talking about these false teachers and why we need to contend with them. Jude picks out two characteristics of these false teachers. First, that they “*pervert the grace of our God into sensuality*”. The Greek word translated “*sensuality*” has the sense of “*blatant immorality*”. These ungodly people are taking advantage of God’s unmerited gift of salvation, of God’s gracious gift of forgiveness to behave without any moral constraint. These false teachers are trying to convince the believers that being saved by grace gives them license to sin.

The second characteristic is that they “*deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*” In Titus 1, Verse 16 it says of false teachers, “*They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.*” The point here is that through their teaching and their actions they reveal their unwillingness to submit to Christ and their allegiance to other gods and other masters.

We are called to a different way, we are called to contend for “*the faith*”. If as Jesus said in John 14:6, that “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*”, then there is salvation in no one else. If no one can come to the Father except through Christ, then we really want to make sure that people know who Jesus is and how they can come to God through Him. There isn’t anything more important than that; it is of supreme importance. In Acts 4, Verses 11 & 12, the Apostle Peter stood up in front of the leaders of that day and said, “*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*”

The message here is that **there is only one way to God and that way is Jesus**. Too often people in the world think that Christians are rude or intolerant, and sometimes we give them reason to think that. In our best moments, we defend the truth out of love, love for God and love for people who need to know the truth. If we must disagree with the thoughts and doctrines of others, it is because we believe that religion without Jesus Christ doesn’t work.

If the world shows us a path that does not lead to Jesus Christ as he actually appears in the gospels, or a way of life that will lead people away from the Father and toward condemnation, then out of love, not hatred, out of compassion, not intolerance, it falls to us to “*contend for the faith that was once for all time delivered to the saints.*” We live in a world full of false paths, false paths that ultimately only end up in hell. But God put us here to “*contend for the faith*”, so that we can love people and point them to the Gospel. So that we can point them toward Jesus, that Savior who alone is “*the way, the truth and the life.*”