

# EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

Recently in our BibleShare discussions, we had completed the Book of Daniel. Having completed this book that was so full and rich in many “life lessons” as well as Biblical prophecies concerning the “end times,” I thought it would be a good idea to go through and

discuss the letter of Jude. I thought it would be a fitting letter to read after discussing the end time prophecies found in Daniel. After all, Jude does discuss some very important issues which deal directly with and are so relevant to end time prophecy as well as the times we are living in, which many believe (including myself) are the beginning “birth pangs” of the end times. Actually, we have been living in the “end times” and awaiting Jesus’ return ever since He ascended to the right hand of the Father more than two thousand years ago.

Jude, I thought, being such a short letter (one chapter), would take us, at the most, maybe 4 or 5 weeks to go through. Then, we would simply go on to the next Book that I thought the Lord would want us to discuss. When I mentioned to the group that we were going to discuss Jude, one in our group spoke out and said that they were so glad that we were doing Jude but that they were confident it would take us at least 21 weeks. We all shared a laugh on that. After all, Jude is only 25 verses. Well, needless to say, we are in our 7<sup>th</sup> week of discussing the letter that Jude wrote to the Body of believers and we are only up to verse 5!!! There is so much in this letter that is so relevant and eerily prophetic concerning the times we are living in. This discussion, “Contend for the Faith” was birthed out of our times so far in BibleShare concerning the letter that Jude wrote to the Body of Christ both at that time and to all believers today.

As we read the letter of Jude, we see that in verse 3, Jude’s intention was to write a letter of exhortation concerning the believers’ “common salvation.” However, as we continue to read, we see that Jude felt compelled, I believe by the Holy Spirit, to write a letter to the Body of Christ concerning a different matter. It was a matter which was steadily becoming an issue of utmost importance because it was threatening to affect the Body of Christ, not just at that time but for years to come. In Jude 1:3, Jude, who was the “half brother of Jesus,” implores the readers of his letter, believers, to “*contend for the faith.*” This was because, as he states in verse 4, there are those who have “crept in unawares” (our BibleShare group has labeled them “creeps”) into the Body of Christ.

These “ungodly men” (creeps) came in “stealthfully” as tools of the enemy for the purpose of, as Jude puts it, “*turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*” This statement by Jude is a very sobering one. These men were literally, coming against the most fundamental truths and precepts of the Gospel.

These were men who did not look like or seem like “enemies” of the faith. They did not come in and blatantly tell everyone that they were there to destroy or bring deception into the Body of Christ. They may or may not have come in maliciously. We are not told anything other than they came into the Body of Christ and began infiltrating it with “false doctrines and teachings.” They would be called “apostates” who were bringing “apostasy” (teachings that are contrary to the truth) into the hearts and minds of believers. They may have been well-intentioned or they may have known exactly what they were doing. It did not matter. The fact was that, whatever the motive, the Body of Christ was in danger and Jude was “sounding the alarm.” What was the Body of Christ in danger of? They were in danger of being drawn away from the true God and His Word – the absolute truth, which ultimately could and would affect a person’s salvation.

Notice, what Jude tells us in verse 4 concerning these men. He tells us that the result (consequences) of their conduct of misleading the believers into wrong, incorrect or false teachings had been established (“*ordained*”) and set forth by God from the very beginning of time. God, in His omniscience, knew that there would be those that would come against Him and His Word.

It happened throughout Jewish history as found in the Jewish scriptures and it would happen throughout the history of the Body of Christ until the day of the Lord would come. Jude states that the fate of these people would be “*condemnation.*” The Amplified Version states it this way, “*Their doom was predicted long ago...*” In other words, God took this kind of behavior very seriously and warned that anyone who would be used, either purposely or naively, in this way would be “condemned” and “doomed.” Hmmm...

We see in the letter of James, the writer warns of this as he states in James 3:1, “*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*” James was giving a warning to all those who would be given the opportunity to bring teaching and doctrines to believers that it was to be a “heavy” responsibility and one that God took very seriously. We hear Jesus warn of this in Matthew 18:6, “*But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*” Yes, Jesus was speaking of offending and turning away children from Him but yet the principle still applies to those of all ages. The consequences would be and are, very severe.

So what did Jude mean when he exhorts the believer to “*earnestly contend for the faith?*” Let’s break it down. First, let’s take a look at the phrase “*earnestly contend.*” These words, translated from the Greek, are actually one Greek word – “*agōnizomai.*” It was used as a term for competitions against an adversary or foe. As a phrase it means to endeavor with an extreme and strenuous amount of energy to win the contest. It meant that the individual had to put everything they had into overcoming their combatant. It is where we get our English word, “agonize” from. It is expressing that there is a difficult struggle that the individual is encountering.

There is a sense of “agonizing” over this contest because the stakes are so very high. Therefore, the term “*earnestly contend*” speaks to the point that this “contest” is going to involve hard and diligent work and that the “stakes” are very, very high. It also is inferring that it will be a continuous struggle. So what is the “contest” that Jude is referring to?

That leads us to the next part of our phrase – “*...the faith.*” Notice that Jude says “*the faith,*” and not simply “*faith.*” There is a difference. Jude is not speaking here about an individual’s own personal walk in faith, although it is important to endeavor to walk and live by faith personally. However, Jude uses, the term, “*...**the** faith.*” Jude is referring to the essential truths of the Gospel that were expressed by Jesus and the Apostles. He is referring to the body of truth that formed and became the foundation for the Body of Christ. Another way of saying it is that Jude is speaking about “sound doctrine.”

As we previously mentioned, Jude in verse 3 tells us that these ungodly men were bringing into the Body of Christ teachings that were, “*...turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*” This was quite an accusation that Jude was making. He was accusing them of coming against the most fundamental and vital truths and precepts of “*the faith.*”

The first thing He mentions is that these ungodly men were, “*... turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness...*” Many translations use the word “licentiousness.” Both these words express an attitude of heart of lawlessness, wantonness, and gross immorality. It refers to allowing and openly doing sin **without any shadow of shame**. In other words Jude was saying that these “creeps” were teaching that it was okay to do things contrary to what the Word of God, the commandments spoken of in the Jewish scriptures tell us concerning what sin is, because now they were under grace. The Amplified Version states it this way, “*...ungodly (impious, profane) persons **who pervert the grace** (the spiritual blessing and favor) of our God into lawlessness and wantonness and immorality...*”

Two fundamental scriptures found in the New Testament are John 3:16 that tells us that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to give us eternal life and save us from our sin and Romans 6:23 that tells us what the wages of that sin - death. An integral part of God's love is, indeed, His grace. However, it was not grace that sent Jesus but rather it was His love that sent Jesus. (John 3:16) We somehow have taken God's love out of the picture and exchanged it with grace.

The scriptures are clear – “God is love.”(1John 4:7-8) It does not say – God is grace. Now please, do not misunderstand me. I am not coming against God's grace. I am aware that the scriptures clearly tell us that we are “*saved by grace.*” What I am saying is that grace is an outgrowth and only one of the characteristics of God's love. Yes, God's grace is amazing. However, it was God's love that caused Him to show favor (grace) upon a world destined for eternal damnation. It was God's love that then showed mercy and sent Jesus to save us. It was God's love that then “set us at one again” with our Father bringing us into peace (relationship) with Him. God's love entails many aspects – grace, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, etc. However, we must remember that it also encompasses God's judgment.

We fail to realize that the greatest expression of the love of God to man is the ability to have free will. That in itself was God's grace in action from the very beginning. Every individual has the ability to choose whatever they want to do. However, another aspect of God's love is that He clearly tells us before hand what the blessings or consequences would be concerning those choices we make. That is perfect love. We are not puppets. He is not a dictator. We are not forced to do His will. However, God clearly states what will happen when we choose to obey or disobey and do what is right in our own eyes.

As Jude was declaring, these ungodly people were perverting God's grace and teaching that it was something that it was not. Grace is not a license to do what we think is right in our own eyes. It does not give us a license to sin knowing that God has already forgiven us. Grace does not do away with repentance for an act of disobedience. Grace tells us that if we do mess up and confess what we did (repent) we have a Father who is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us. (1John 1:9)

Actually, God's grace is given to every believer for the purpose of having the ability to do His will, keep His commandments and follow His Word. It is God's grace that gives us the ability to overcome and be victorious over sin when it comes knocking on our door. It is a powerful aspect of our relationship with God. However, it is only powerful if we correctly understand it and do not pervert it – as these ungodly men were teaching.

The next thing we see in verse 3 concerning what these ungodly men were teaching was, “...*denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*” In many of the original texts the phrase, “*the only Lord God,*” is not found which places the emphasis of their false teachings clearly on or I should say against, the Lord Jesus Christ. These apostates, in Jude's eyes, were denying the Lordship of Jesus, as well as Him being Christ (Messiah). They were clearly opposing the fact that Jesus was and is the absolute, supreme and final authority over all things – including the believer's life. They were doing this by teaching that believers could do whatever they wanted because it would not affect their salvation. They denied Jesus' teachings because they were no longer relevant. In their subtle ways they denied the fact that He was the Christ (Messiah) – the Anointed Son of God. They denied that Jesus came in the flesh stating that if He was the Son of God, He had to come only in spirit form. By the way John calls this the “spirit of antichrist.” (1John 4:3)

It is interesting to note that Jude links a distorted view of God's grace with the denial of who Jesus is and His teaching when He came to earth. Jude also links the inordinate view of God's grace with the denial of Jesus as being the absolute Lord over all things (including the believer's life) and the denying of Jesus as the Messiah - the Son of David, the Son of God. Again, John calls it, “the spirit of antichrist.” Hmmm.....

These ungodly men, “creeps” as we said, were perverting the sound doctrine of “the faith.” They were infiltrating, diluting and polluting the “sound doctrines” of the faith with Greek, as well as pagan philosophies. They were bringing in the Greek philosophies of “Gnosticism” and “antinomianism.” There were other “creeps” that were infiltrating the Body of Christ with their errors to doctrine. Some of these were referred to by Paul as “Judaizers” who were trying to bring back many things of Judaism, such as circumcision and other rituals that clearly come against the fundamental truth that Jesus was the “once and for all final sacrifice.”

Yes, as we can see, from the beginning of the Body of Christ, the enemy was immediately coming from within to pervert God’s truth; pervert His Word; to pervert and come against “sound doctrine.” This was, is and always will be his tactic. He did this with Adam and Eve. He did this with the Children of Israel in the Wilderness. He did this throughout the history of the Jewish people. And he continues to do it today.

The other thing we need to take note of in Jude 1:3 is that Jude also writes, “...*which was once delivered unto the saints.*” Jude is telling the Body of Christ that they have heard what sound doctrine was. Those in the Body who came to faith in Jesus heard it from the Apostles who were with Jesus and who personally heard it from Him. Those in the Body who came to faith heard it from the apostle Paul who had seen and heard Jesus and had been with and spent time with the other Apostles. It was “delivered” to them by those whom God had originally entrusted to bring and establish “sound doctrine” from the very beginnings of the Church. They had heard and knew the absolute truth as given by the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the ones chosen and entrusted by the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to preach the Good News.

This is what Paul was referring to in Ephesians 4:11-14, “*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive...*” This is exactly what Jude is writing. Isn’t it amazing that all of the New Testament writers say the same thing. Why – because there was a unity and oneness in and of the spirit. That is quite different from today. We have over 28,000 denominations saying different things, but yet each one calling themselves the Body of Christ. Hmmmm....

So what is “*the faith?*” What did Jude consider “sound doctrine?” Well, I am not going to sit here and pretend to know everything about sound doctrine. I am telling you up front that I do not. However, there are some basic fundamentals of the faith as given by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament. One of the first things to grasp is that the entire “Old Testament” is just as vital for sound doctrine as everything in the New Testament. Paul in 2Timothy 3:16 tells us, “*All **scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...*”

The “scriptures” that the New Testament writers refer us to are the only scriptures they had – the Jewish scriptures – those that we unfortunately have named and refer to as the “Old Testament.” I believe this is where much error in doctrinal discussions begins. There is nothing “old” about these scriptures. Yes, we are in a new covenant through the blood of Jesus. However, as we have just read that does not mean that these Jewish scriptures are old or irrelevant because the New Testament writers refer to them so much.

After Jesus’ resurrection, He had met with His disciples to teach them the Good News message and doctrinal truths. We read in Luke 24:44-48 “*And he said unto them, These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, **which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.** Then opened he their understanding, that they **might understand the scriptures,** And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved **Christ to suffer,** and*

***to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.***

When Jesus met the two on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:25-32, He “opened the scriptures” and told them the same message - that in the scriptures, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, it was prophesied that Messiah would suffer, die (be crucified) but then He would enter into His glory – His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. When they heard Him teach, their hearts burned from within.

In the early church this became known as the “Apostles’ doctrine” as it states in Acts 2:42, *“And they continued steadfastly in the **apostles’ doctrine** and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* Based on Jesus’ teachings to His disciples/Apostles and then repeated by Paul, we can say that there are some basic fundamentals of “sound doctrine” that all the apostles, “these special messengers,” taught.

Below are some basic, foundational and fundamental aspects of the “Apostle’s doctrine”

- Jesus Christ Crucified
- Jesus Christ Has Risen and is seated at the right hand of the Father
- Jesus Christ is Lord and Messiah (son of David/ Son of God) in fulfillment of the prophecies found within the Jewish scriptures
- Christ will come again at the time appointed in fulfillment of both Old and New Testaments.
- Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Jewish scriptures (Moses and the prophets)
- Repentance, baptism and receiving forgiveness from sin
- Whosoever calls on the Name of the Lord (Jesus) shall be saved
- The promise of the Holy Spirit to those who believe for both the regenerating of the individual’s spirit and for empowerment to walk in the lifestyle role modeled by Jesus.

(Again, this is not an exhaustive study in doctrine – just some basic fundamentals of “the faith.”)

We can see these basic doctrinal truths brought forth by Peter in his first three times of preaching to the people as found in Acts 2:12-42; Acts 3:12-26; Acts 4:8-12. I encourage you to read these wonderful examples of someone bringing forth “sound doctrine.”

Jude encourages the believers to *“earnestly contend for the faith.”* This means that as believers we are to know what we believe and why. Unfortunately, many of us just repeat what we have heard and when challenged cannot truly defend and contend for the faith other than to say things such as, “Well that is what my pastor said,” or someone else said. Unfortunately, many of us do know why we believe what we say we believe. I encourage each of us to read and study the scriptures for ourselves – both the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament.

1 Peter 3:15-17 encourages us, *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and **be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.”*** Every believer must always be ready with an answer when they are called to defend and **“earnestly contend for the faith.”**