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CONTEND FOR THE FAITH!

JUDE 3

BELOVED, WHEN I GAVE ALL DILIGENCE TO WRITE unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

The Book of Jude is about apostasy, that is, the *reality* of it and how to *recognize* it at a glance. This is a book that every Christian needs to know. It is the only book of the Bible that is devoted *exclusively* to exposing false teachers and instructing us how to defend the faith.

Some 30 years ago, I preached through Jude. These many years later, I decided to do so again simply because of the staggering reality of how much further we have drifted into apostasy. The second time through (Aug.—Nov. 2019) was even more grievous than the first. Every day I grow more and more burdened by what I see not only in *Christendom*, that mass of 2.1 billion professing Christians worldwide, but in *Christianity* proper, those who are born again and supposedly evangelical, and how they are drifting away from **the faith which was once delivered to the saints**. And I then shudder again when I think of what another 30 years will bring! “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Oh, what a verse is before us! What a challenge it is! Stated simply, Jude’s purpose in writing was to instruct and urge his readers to **contend for the faith**. However, this was *not* his intended purpose when he first sat down to write. I am thankful he included this detail. As we will see, in fact, it actually has great bearing on Jude’s message. We need to examine this truth. To get a firm grasp of this verse, let us note the contrast between Jude’s first intention and then his final compulsion.

Jude’s First Intention (v. 3a)

We can further divide Jude’s intention into two emphases. *First*, he intended to write a leisurely letter. There is a truly significant difference in the two instances of the word **write**. While both are the verb *graphō*, they are in different tenses. The first instance is in the present infinitive and could be translated “to be writing.” As one commentator suggests, this paints a picture of writing in a leisurely style.¹ The second instance, however (3b), is in the aorist infinitive,

indicating punctiliar action. As the same commentator goes on to point out, the idea here is Jude “snatching up his pen to write.” In other words, Jude’s entire attitude, motive, and thrust immediately changes from one phrase to the next. While he first was simply going to write a casual letter, in the next instant he snatched up his pen and wrote with urgency.

Second, Jude intended to merely write about salvation. Note the first phrase of the verse, **I gave all diligence**. **Diligence** is *spoudē*, which also means speed and haste. In Classical Greek, this verb means “to make haste and is thus closely related to ‘to be zealous, active, concerned about something.’”² The usual idea in New Testament usage is “zealous effort.” So Jude’s style might have been leisurely, but neither was it lazy. He still writes with a passion and concern for the truths of **salvation**. He wanted to write about the glorious **salvation** we have in Christ. I look forward to heaven when I can ask Jude what he wanted to write.

In the meantime, let us take a moment to ask: what exactly is **salvation**? *Sōtēria* (e.g., Rom. 1:16; 10:9–10; Eph. 1:13; Heb. 5:9; etc.) means safety, deliverance, and preservation from danger or destruction. To hear the “Gospel” preached in many churches today, however, even some professing evangelical ones, you would never know they were talking about biblical **salvation**. Deliverance from *destruction*? Fewer and fewer preachers mention such an “offensive” concept. Today’s “gospel” says, “Just come to Jesus and He will take care of all your problems,” or “He will make you a better ball-player,” or “He will give you everything you want.” But God’s Word unambiguously reveals how sinful man is and how holy God is. It clearly explains that God, *solely* through His grace, mercy, and love reached down to save a dead race, a race that hated Him. As Lamentations 3:22 declares: “It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.” Wow! Why would Jeremiah use the word *consumed*? Because God is “consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29). Salvation is deliverance and safety from the judgment and wrath of God (cf. Rom. 1:18). How often do we hear that preached nowadays?

So, in contrast to the definition of **salvation** offered by

today's "new theology," which is, "liberation from the oppression of this world's structures"³ (whatever that means), I would offer this one, which I believe is soundly based on the Word of God:

Salvation is the sole act of God whereby He by His mercy and grace eternally redeems His elect believers and delivers them from their sin and the resultant spiritual death through the once-for-all redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Any other doctrine than this should be cursed. As Paul told the Galatians (1:8-9): "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Oh, how we need to boldly declare that anyone who does not preach the true biblical Gospel should be told that they are under God's curse. Indeed, we hear false gospels everywhere, and every one of them should be exposed and condemned for what it is. Salvation is not about *self-esteem*, it is not about the so-called *seeker's needs*, and it is not about *sentimentality*. It's about *sin* and the *Savior*.

To explain further what he wanted to write, Jude adds the word **common**. This is the Greek *koinos*, which means "common, mutual, belonging to several." This is important since the Greek used in the New Testament is called "Koine Greek," that is, the common language of the people, the common language of the day, in contrast to the more ancient and formal Classical Greek. So, Jude is saying that he wanted to write about the things believers have in **common**, the things we all mutually possess. Think of the things we have in common: justification, sanctification, adoption into God's family, unity in Christ's Body, and so much more! Another indication of this fact is Jude's usage of **beloved**. One of the many things all Christians have in common is the fact that they all are "the beloved of God." But even though all this is a grand theme on which to write, it is not what Jude wrote.

Jude's Final Compulsion (v. 3b)

We can discern three emphases here.

Jude was Compelled to Write

The statement, **It was needful for me to write** can also be translated as it is in *Young's Literal Translation*: "I had necessity to write." A very similar expression appears in I Corinthians 9:16: "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel." Paul is saying here that the Holy Spirit compelled him. Likewise, Jude was compelled by the Holy Spirit to write a warning about apostasy. The Greek behind **needful** is *anankē*, the root (*anank*) literally meaning "pressure." So "pressure" was brought upon Jude by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brought such a burden and weight upon Jude that he had no other recourse but to snatch up his pen and write exactly what God compelled him to write. The Spirit showed Jude the need, Jude understood the need, and Jude wrote down the need.

Jude Wrote About the Core of our Faith

What is the core, the very essence, of our faith? Oh, how

important this principle is! The word **faith** (along with the definite article **the**) is not a verb, that is, it is not about the *action* of faith. Rather, it is a noun that refers to "the body of revealed truth that constitutes Historical, Evangelical Christianity." This doesn't mean an entire system of theology on which we all can agree; that would be impossible. Rather it refers again to the unique revelation of God through Christ. More specifically, this body of truth is the very essence of the Gospel, *the redemption by blood and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone*. That is the Faith. This one faith is clearly stated in Romans 1:16-17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Also implicit in **the faith** is where this body of revealed truth is located, namely, *the Scriptures*. In other words, it is obviously the completed Scriptures that contain the record of **the faith which was once delivered unto the saints**. In fact, a basic acknowledgment of Scripture as the Word of God is automatic in salvation. Why? Because the person is saying, "I believe what the Bible says about sin, salvation, and the Savior." Here is an acknowledgment of Scripture being true in its revelation of Christ. As Paul also declared to Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Those early Christians had a body of basic doctrine (the Apostles' doctrine; cf. Acts 2:42) that they believed and committed to others. We need to further examine this wonderful term, *Historical Evangelical Christianity*. This term truly encapsulates the Faith, that is, New Testament Christianity.

First, our faith is foremost and primarily a *historical* faith. The words **once delivered** show this historical aspect. Literally translated this phrase reads, "Once-for-all delivered" and, of course, is referring to the preaching and teaching of the Apostles as the historical base of our faith. Again, we find this principle in Acts 2:42: "And they continued stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine." "Doctrine" is *didachē*, which means not only teaching but also stresses what is actually taught, that is, a body of doctrine.

Even more instructive is the basic meaning of the word **delivered**. This is the Greek *paradidōmi*, which carries the basic meaning "to hand over, deliver up." But when used in a context such as here in Jude it means "to hand down, pass one instruction from teacher to pupil" and also "conveys the idea of handing down" teaching.⁴ Other examples of this idea are found elsewhere (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:2; 11:23ff; 15:3).

So, our faith is historical! We can look at many religions, many cults, many systems, many "faiths," but not one of them is historical, that is, based on historical fact, except Christianity. Our faith is based on the historical fact of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our faith is not mystical, hypothetical, or philosophical. *It is historical!* Several skeptics have tried to disprove the resurrection, some of whom later came to Christ because the historical evidence is undeniable (e.g., Josh McDowell and Lee Strobel).

Second, our faith is *evangelical*. This term refers to believ-

ing in what we call the “evangel.” This word simply describes “the Gospel message.” The Greek for “Gospel” is *euangellion*, which literally means “good message” (or good news). This is the word from which we get the English words “evangelism” and, of course, “evangel.” W. E. Vine defines it beautifully, “Denotes the good tidings of the Kingdom of God and of salvation through Christ.”⁵ This word has an interesting etymology. It is a compound comprised of *eu*, “good,” and *aggellō*, “to proclaim, tell,” and so to tell something good. The English “Gospel,” however, is even more fascinating. It comes from the Old English *gōdspel*: *gōd*, “good,” and *spel*, “tale.” Witches were said to cast a *spell*, that is, say certain words that supposedly had magic powers. To *spellbind* is to speak in such a way as to hold people’s attention. To *spell* a word means to name or write the letters of the word. So, the Gospel is, indeed, the good *spell*, the good *tale*, the good *story*, the good *message*, the good *news*.

Even more significantly, the Gospel is *the only* good tale. The definite article (**the**) is present quite often in the Greek. One of the best examples is Ephesians 1:13, where Paul wrote that they had heard of “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” What is significant here is that while the definite article is present only twice in the English, it appears three times in the Greek. We can literally read it: “*the* message of *the* truth, *the* good news of your salvation.” Paul wants to make it clear that there is *only one good news*. While many teachers claim they have other “good news,” salvation is found only in the good news of Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:6). So to be “evangelical” means believing in the “evangel,” that is, the Gospel, the good news, of Jesus Christ.

We should also note something subtle here. Interestingly, while Jude did not write about salvation *directly* (as he intended), he nonetheless writes about salvation *indirectly*—he still manages to slide it in. He writes about contending for **the faith**, but which faith? The evangel! The Gospel message, the glorious salvation in Jesus Christ.

Third, our faith is *Christianity*. Is this redundant? Is this not self-explanatory? Sadly, it is not. This is because it is quite often confused with the idea of “Christendom,” and there is a vast difference between the two. *Christendom* is a global term that describes countries or communities that, to one extent or another, adhere to principles and practices gleaned from the Bible. Further, it does not imply regeneration or any other aspect of biblical salvation. In other words, it is critical to understand that *Christendom* is only *professed* Christianity. For example, just because a judicial system might use the Ten Commandments as its foundation (something American courts, in fact, are trying to remove from the courtroom) does not mean the system is truly Christian in the biblical sense of judges who have been regenerated in salvation.

In dramatic contrast, then, *Christianity* is not about *religion*, but rather *relationship*, a personal relationship with its founder Jesus Christ. It is not about a creed, a code, or even a conviction. It is about being right with God because of His grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and about recognizing His Word alone (not tradition or human reason) as authoritative and sufficient. So, not all those who live under the giant banner of CHRISTENDOM are true, born-again Christians. While many European nations, for example, were

once mostly *Christian*, they are today simply part of the 2.1 billion members of *Christendom* because they replaced Biblical Christianity with Secular Humanism. Here in our text, then, biblical Christianity is not only *implied*, but it is *stated* in verse 4, “The only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This wonderful term, “Historical Evangelical Christianity,” brings to mind many blessed truths. It also, however, brings to mind a couple of practical questions for today.

Question 1: Is it enough to call ourselves “Christians”? Is it enough to say, “I’m a Christian”? There are indeed many who say that but at the same time are not faithful to a local church, have little or no interest in Scripture, dislike (or even despise) preaching, and have no concern for deeper spiritual living and Truth. Are such people truly Christians? How can we possibly think they are? To be a Christian means we have been transformed. Our thinking is different. We want Truth! We love the Word of God and desire to obey it. We want to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). We no longer want to be like the world. Tragically, then, in light of our discussion a moment ago, the title “Christian” is simply not enough. It is an enormously broad term, especially in America. Many call themselves Christians just because they were born in America, made some kind of profession, “asked Jesus into their heart,” or just because they “believe in Jesus.” So, what often happens is that true believers are “lumped-in” with the masses in *Christendom* who *claim* to be *Christian*. J. I. Packer well addressed this matter some years ago:

Evangelicalism is . . . we maintain, the oldest version of Christianity . . . apostolic Christianity itself. Ideally, the evangelical would choose no title for himself but ‘Christian.’ He holds that he alone is entitled to call his faith ‘Christian’ without qualification. If, however, he must use a further label to differentiate himself from other groups within the Church, he accepts ‘Evangelical’ as being the historically established-term for his position, and one which by its very form bears witness to his belief that, of all forms of Christianity, this alone is loyal to the nature and content of the Evangel.⁶

Dear Christian Reader, let us consider ourselves, as I heard one dear preacher passionately say, “Out and out evangelicals.” The next time we come in contact with someone who says, “Oh, I’m a Christian,” let us lovingly dig deeper and ask, “What do you base that on? What’s your salvation testimony? Were you saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone as you repented of your sin? Is the Bible the authority in your life?” If they are still standing there by this time, you will probably get your answer. If they are not a Christian, lovingly tell them how they can be.

Now, that being said, what has tragically occurred in recent years is that even the term “evangelical” has deteriorated. Driven mostly by our culture, compromise on doctrine and practice has begun to erode Evangelicalism itself. Should we therefore cast it off and *create* another? No, we should **contend** for it, fight for what it is, not what anybody *thinks* it is, but what it *really* is. This is the biblical term, so let us call ourselves “Thoroughly Biblical Evangelicals” because we want to **contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints**. That leads to a second question.

Question 2: Should we call ourselves “Fundamentalists”? I thought long and hard about this question and whether or not to even raise it. I do so, however, for what I am convinced is good reason. I am compelled to contend for Historical Evangelical Christianity, and therefore not any other term that has been created. I know some will disagree, but I prayerfully ask the reader to “hear me out.”

First, consider a brief history of Fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is an American-born term that was adopted by a group of Evangelicals from all Protestant denominations who banded together to fight Liberalism. Those individuals did not want to be called “Evangelicals” because they did not want to be confused with “Neo-evangelicals.” So, tragically, to get away from a *false* term, they actually, I respectfully submit, rejected the *real* term. The term “Fundamentalism” developed from the practice of referring to the basic doctrines of the Word of God as “The Fundamentals.” In fact, this practice goes as far back as 1909. It was in that year that the first of twelve wonderful little volumes on the exposition and defense of Evangelical Christianity appeared. This series was titled, *The Fundamentals* and is truly rich in its content. So, “by definition”—and please note this—Evangelicals *are* Fundamentalists and Fundamentalists *are* Evangelicals.

Second, however, in the final analysis the term “Fundamentalism” is an unfortunate one for four reasons.

1. This term suggests that “Evangelicalism” is not enough. But, as we have seen, Evangelicalism *is* enough because it is grounded in biblical language. We care not a whit about “Neo-evangelicalism” or any other falsehood. We are grounded in the “Evangel.” In contrast, “Fundamentalism” is not grounded in biblical terminology.

2. This term is actually reactionary. It is a man-made term that came about to fight another man-made term (Liberalism). But all we need to fight falsehood is God’s Word and the terms we find there.

3. To fight Liberalism, which was (and still is) rampant intellectualism, Fundamentalism became unscholarly. It distrusted scholarship and, therefore, lacked depth, and in many ways this is still true today. There is a lot of shallow preaching and many shallow Christians in Fundamentalist circles. *False* scholarship is a lie but we must have *true* scholarship and deep teaching if we are going to stand against apostasy. There is much good scholarship in the afore mentioned series, *The Fundamentals*, but like any man-made system, Fundamentalism has deteriorated.

4. This term is being used today to describe different groups from Independent Baptists, to the I.F.C.A. (Independent Fundamental Churches of America, Inc.), to Charismatics, to snake handlers, and even some “fundamental Catholic organizations,” not to mention Islamic Fundamentalists. The news media today is having a “hay-day” with this term. But I have yet to hear anyone in the media speak of someone who is a “Thoroughly Biblical Evangelical.”

I would submit, therefore, that “Fundamentalism” is an unnecessary and unfortunate term. Yes, the early Fundamentalists “fought a good fight,” and they most certainly did “keep the faith.” We truly thank God for such men who stood for the Truth. But it would have been far better if they had just defended “Historical Evangelical Christianity” by name, adding nothing. J. I. Packer again sums it up:

The way for us to show gratitude to God for the courageous battle which the Fundamentalists fought is by seeking to reopen the richer vein of the Evangelicalism which they laboured to defend. And, therefore, we prefer to call ourselves “Evangelicals” rather than “Fundamentalists.”⁷

Well said.

Jude Wrote to Urge Us to Contend for the Faith

Among the most dominant and tragic characteristics of our day is an almost total *disinterest* in, *disregard* of, and even *disdain* for **truth**. And, as Puritan William Gurnall rightly pointed out more than 360 years ago in his classic exposition of Ephesians 6:10–20, *The Christian in Complete Armor*, “Not to desire [truth] is to despise it.”⁸ Relativism rules the day. Most people think truth is different for each person. What might be true for one might not be true for another. Each person must find his or her own “truth,” what is good for them. Absolutes have virtually vanished entirely.

Far more tragic, however, is that many professed Christians think exactly the same way. To many of these, doctrine doesn’t really matter and truth is relative, totally open to everyone’s “interpretation” of the Bible. Such people care not what the text actually *says* but what they *think* it says or, more often, what they *make* it say. The issue, however, is always about the text. While there are some other principles (context, history, etc), the foundation of solid biblical interpretation is the text itself.

It is for that reason that godly Christians need to be challenged to love Truth. My dear Christian friend, do you passionately love Truth? Nothing equals that in importance. As Gurnall writes again:

[Truth] is the great treasure, which God delivers to His saints, with a strict and solemn charge to keep against all that undermine or oppose it. Some things we trust God with, some things God trusts us with. . . . That which God trusts us chiefly with is His Truth.⁹

Think of it! The sovereign God and Creator of the universe has entrusted us with Truth, placed it in our hands to learn it, love it, care for it, guard it, proclaim it, and to fight for it. Let us each ask ourselves, “How am I treating God’s Truth?”

The words **earnestly contend** are a single word in the Greek, *epagōnizomai*, which appears only here in the New Testament. At the heart of this compound word is the root *agōn* (English *agony*), which means “strife, contention, [a] contest for victory.” It, along with the verb *agōnizomai*, originally referred to the fighting and struggle involved in the Greek games, especially the savage wrestling match (cf. “wrestle” in Eph. 6:12). By adding the prefix *epi* (“for”), Jude is telling us that we must agonize, savagely fight for the faith. The namby-pamby approach of our day where we want to “have a dialogue,” be open to other views, or even apologize for our own is foreign to Scripture. We are to proclaim, “This is Truth!” Like Paul in Ephesians 6:10–20, Jude uses graphic imagery to picture the spiritual war in which we are engaged, an all-out war that gives no quarter to error or to those who propagate it. *We should, in fact, rebuke false teachers.* Seventeenth century English Nonconformist theo-

logian Matthew Poole put it well: we earnestly contend “by constancy in the faith, zeal for the truth, holiness of life, mutual exhortation, prayer, suffering for the gospel, etcetera against those that would pervert the gospel.”¹⁰

Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, “Defend the Bible? I would sooner defend a lion!” Although we know what he means, we must differ just a tiny bit. No, we do not defend the Bible as man thinks of defense. It says what it says, and that is the end of the matter. But we do defend it in that we *stand* for it, we *live* it, we *proclaim* it. So how can we contend for the faith? We contend for the faith in many ways:

- We contend when we are hunger and thirst for the Word and seek out pure sources to nourish us.
- We contend when we train our children in the things of God.
- We contend when we are faithful witnesses of Christ to those around us.
- We contend when we stand firm on absolute biblical authority and its singular sufficiency, adding nothing and subtracting nothing.
- We contend when we fight modern trends that threaten biblical truth and Church ministry.
- We contend when we fellowship with and support only those who hold to biblical authority.
- We contend when we make our churches the training ground for all Christian service.
- A pastor contends when he spends hours in God’s Word so he may feed God’s people.
- All Christians contend when they encourage their pastor to do that work.

Let us note one other thought Jude conveys. He *exhorts* us to contend for the faith. *Exhort* is *parakaleō*, “to call to one’s side to help.” It is not only used of the act of comforting and encouraging but also to address someone with exhortation, entreaty, pleading, admonition, and instruction. Real comfort, then, is not patting someone on the head and saying, “Oh, everything will be okay,” or, “Just hang in there.” That is not comfort; that is patronizing. Real comfort involves pleading and teaching, and Jude does just that, com-

forting, encouraging, exhorting, instructing, and challenging us to contend for the faith.

Why is all this vital? *Because of apostasy*. This sets the stage for the remainder of the letter. Today, as never before, Christians need to be contending for the faith. Are you? Are you clinging to Historical, Evangelical Christianity? This truly is the only true **faith** because it is *historical*, because it is *evangelical*, and because it is based in Christianity, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jude has much more to say on how to contend for the faith in verses 17–23, but for now, let us commit ourselves to **earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints**.

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NOTES

- ¹ Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude: Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1984).
- ² Gerhard Kittle (Ed.) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1985), Vol. VII, 559.
- ³ Cited in James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (InterVarsity, 1986 revised edition), 674. I should point out that Boice does *not agree* with this definition. On the contrary, he criticizes it and demonstrates how the church has fallen into “secularism.”
- ⁴ Colin Brown (Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan, 1975), Vol. 3, 772–773.
- ⁵ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Co, 1966), Pat II, 167.
- ⁶ J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Eerdmans, 1974), 38.
- ⁷ Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, 38.
- ⁸ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armor* (Banner of Truth reprint, 1974), 294.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, 306.
- ¹⁰ Matthew Poole, *Matthew Poole’s Commentary on the Holy Bible* (public domain, electronic edition), comment on Jude 3.

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