

“Contend Earnestly for the Faith”

“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning the common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you, exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints,” Jude 3.

The book of Jude is a one-chapter, 25-verse epistle written by one who described himself as *“a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James,”* v. 1. There were others mentioned in the New Testament who were also named Jude or Judas. By the process of elimination, it is generally concluded that the *“Jude”* who wrote the book bearing his name was the Jude who was a half brother to Jesus Christ, as was *“James,”* who was also mentioned in the beginning verse. Cf. Matt. 13:55. However, Jude did not refer to the flesh and blood relationship he sustained with Jesus while He was on earth in the flesh. To the contrary, he humbly described himself as *“a bondservant (literally a slave, from doulos, bw) of Jesus Christ and brother of James.”* Properly understood, his spiritual relationship with Jesus was vastly more important than any flesh and blood relationship he may have sustained with Jesus in the past.

Also in the same verse, Jude identified the recipients of this letter as those who were *“called, sanctified by God, and preserved in Jesus Christ.”* These people had been *“called”* by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). They had been *“sanctified,”* or set apart through the instrumentality of the word of God (John 17:17). To these people Jude began by saying *“mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you,”* v. 2.

In verse three Jude got down to business! He stated that he had been *“very diligent”* to write unto these people *“concerning our common salvation,”* v. 3. Being *“diligent,”* Jude had demonstrated eagerness and zeal to thus write. By referring to the *“common salvation,”* he, in essence, was stating that the *“salvation”* available in Christ is common to both Jews and Gentiles, that God has the same plan for one and all. The gospel is to be preached to *“every creature,”* Mark 16:15. *“The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,”* Titus 2:11, for Jesus *“by the grace of God”* tasted *“death for everyone,”* Heb. 2:9. The Lord did not provide different methods of approach whereby people in this the gospel age could be saved of their alien sins. Indeed, the salvation offered is properly identified as *“the common salvation!”* If God had different terms of pardon for different people, He would be showing *“partiality,”* which Peter plainly said He does not do, Acts 10:34-35.

But in the same verse (v. 3), Jude said *“I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.”* You will please note that Jude mentioned *“the faith;”* he did not refer to *“your faith”* and *“my faith.”* He used *“faith”* in the **objective** sense to denote *“the gospel.”* Illustrating this point, we call your attention to Gal. 1:11, 23, wherein the apostle Paul in the former reference mentioned *“the gospel which was preached by me,”* and in the latter reference mention was made of *“the faith”* which he preached. In those references *“the faith”* and *“the gospel”* are one and the same. So it is in Jude 3; to *“contend earnestly for the faith”* is the same contending earnestly for the gospel.

But you will please note that Jude urged the recipients of this letter to **“contend**

earnestly for the faith..” “*Contend earnestly*” is an adverbial phrase, translated from the Greek, *epagonizomai*, which is a compound word, taken from “*epi*,” denoting that which is intensive, and *agon*, meaning a contest. Weust in His **Word Studies of The Greek New Testament**, said “the simple verb was used of athletes contending in the athletic contests. The word speak of a vigorous, intense, determined struggle to defeat the opposition.” Further comment was made that our word “agony” is the English spelling of the noun form of this Greek word. Clinton Hamilton in His **Commentary** on The Books of Peter and Jude observed that “the Greek athletes exerted themselves to the point of agony in an effort to win the contest,” The point is clear; Christians must contend, even to the point of agony, for “*the faith*.” In I Tim. 6:12 Paul essentially said the same thing in different words; he charged Timothy to “**fight** the good fight of faith...”

In today’s world, and often even among brethren in the Lord, people highly criticize preachers who are fighters; preachers who “*fight the good fight of faith*,” preachers who “*contend earnestly for the faith*.” In so doing, they criticize what the inspired brother of the Lord commanded! Yes, we must “*speak the truth in love*,” Eph. 4:15. Yes, our speech ought to be “*with grace, seasoned with salt*,” Col. 4:6, but let us not forget that all **faithful** Christians are involved in spiritual warfare!

Why did Jude exhort his readers to “*contend earnestly for the faith?*” The very next verse begins to give the reason; he said “*certain men have crept in unnoticed, ...ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ*,” v. 4. On the surface, one might wonder how it would be possible to “*turn the grace of God into lewdness!*” But a little word study answers that question. “*Turn*,” in v. 4, is translated from *metatithentes*,” which Thayer in his **lexicon** says means “to pervert the grace of God to license, i.e. to seek from the grace of God an argument in defense of licentiousness.” In essence, he affirmed that “*certain men*” had taught that “*the grace of God*” provides a license to sin! And they had to be resisted!

However, if you study the rest of this one-chapter book you will discover that Jude not only exhorted his readers to “*contend earnestly for the faith*,” he got very specific; he didn’t mince words! He mentioned “*the angels who did not keep their proper domain*,” v. 6. He mentioned “*Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them*” who had “*given themselves over to sexual immorality*,” v. 7, whom he described as “*dreamers*” who “*defile the flesh*,” v. 8, and said “*they have gone in the way of Cain*,” who had “*run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah*,” v. 11. He went on to describe them as “*grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts*,” who “*mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage*,” v. 18, and said “*these are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit*,” v. 19.

How could “*a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James*,” v. 1, be so graphic in describing the forces of religious error? How could a half brother of the Lord use such language in describing those who were obviously religious people? Could it be that Jude really believed it **does** make difference what a person believes religiously? Could it be that Jude was more concerned about the salvation of precious souls than in being popular in a given community? Could it be that Jude really believed “*the truth*” is what enables one to obtain freedom from sin,” John 8:32, and that “*whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God*,” 2 John 9?

Conclusion: The need to “*contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints,*” Jude 3, is as great today as it was when Jude penned the epistle bearing his name. It is true that one can’t build up a church if all he does is to fight error. And it is also true that any congregation which increases numerically, while error is allowed to remain unopposed, is preparing the soil for complete apostasy! Those who are “too nice” to oppose both sin and error are “too nice” for their own good, and the good of the church! Consider ye well! —Bobby Witherington
